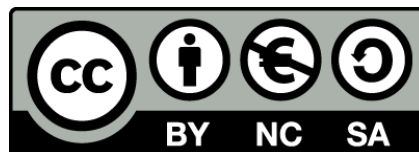




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## Patterns of individual and elite affective polarisation in Latin America

Luis Miguel Remiro Perna



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Facultat de Dret

**Programa de Doctorado en Derecho y Ciencia Política**  
**Línea de Investigación: Ciencia Política**

**Patterns of individual and elite affective polarisation  
in Latin America**

Luis Remiro

**Director:** Prof. Rafael Martínez Martínez

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*A mis padres, por haberme ayudado llegar hasta aquí.  
A Aida, por empujar conmigo, siempre hacia adelante.*



## **Abstract**

This PhD dissertation significantly expands the comparative perspective on affective polarisation, particularly focusing on the underexplored context of Latin America. Affective polarisation, defined as the extent of negativity towards opposing political partisans and positivity towards co-partisans, has been predominantly studied in the context of the United States and Europe. That is why this research seeks to understand its dynamics in the distinct political landscape of Latin America, characterized by volatile party systems, declining democracy, and a shift towards personalism. The dissertation adopts a comprehensive approach, exploring affective polarisation from three perspectives.

The first chapter presents a groundbreaking methodological approach, employing state-of-art computational linguistics to measure elite affective polarisation. This innovative technique allows for a direct observation of the language used by political elites and its contribution to societal divisions. The chapter further investigates how various institutional and contextual factors, such as elite ideological polarisation and electoral volatility, correlate with elite affective polarisation, providing a deeper understanding of its drivers in Latin America.

In the second chapter, the dissertation introduces the novel concept of "leadership identification," redefining the dynamics of political identities beyond traditional partisan affiliations. It reveals that in the distinct political environment of Latin America, particularly in presidential systems, leadership identification has a more pronounced impact on affective polarisation compared to partisan identification. This insight is pivotal in understanding the pre-eminence of political leadership over party identities.

The final chapter of this dissertation examines the consequences of democratic backsliding on affective polarisation, employing a quasi-experimental method. The chapter utilizes the suspension of the 2016 recall referendum in Venezuela as a case study to understand how democratic backsliding influences affective polarisation. The findings reveal asymmetric effects of anti-democratic actions on societal polarisation. Notably, supporters of the ruling party do not alter their evaluations of the opposition, even when exposed to procedural unfairness aimed at suppressing it. In contrast, those identifying with the opposition experience an increase in negative sentiments. This outcome provides a nuanced perspective on affective polarisation within contexts of democratic erosion, highlighting the differential impact of political developments on various segments of society.

The research employs a mix of computational linguistics, sentiment analysis, and survey data to analyse patterns of affective polarisation at the individual and elite level. It contrasts this phenomenon in Latin America with developed democracies, highlighting the unique challenges and complexities of the region. The findings reveal that while affective polarisation is a global trend, its manifestation in Latin America is influenced by factors like the prominent role of political leaders, and declining democratic norms.

This dissertation contributes to the evolving literature on affective polarisation by shedding light on its complexities in Latin America's unique political landscape. It challenges and refines existing theories, offering fresh insights into the dynamics of affective polarisation in non-bipartisan and volatile political settings. The research presented herein lays the groundwork for future studies in the field and enhances our understanding of political behaviour and democratic processes in Latin America.

Keywords: affective polarisation, polarisation, quantitative methods, natural experiment, Latin America.

## Resum

Aquesta tesi doctoral expandeix significativament la perspectiva comparativa sobre la polarització afectiva, enfocant-se particularment en el context poc explorat d'Amèrica Llatina. La polarització afectiva, definida com el grau de negativitat cap a partidaris polítics oposats i positivitat cap als co-partidaris, ha estat predominantment estudiada en el context dels Estats Units i Europa. És per això que aquesta recerca busca comprendre les seves dinàmiques en el distintiu panorama polític d'Amèrica Llatina, caracteritzat per sistemes partidaris volàtils, una democràcia en declivi i un creixent personalisme. La tesi adopta un enfocament integral, explorant la polarització afectiva des de tres perspectives.

El primer capítol presenta un enfocament metodològic innovador, utilitzant lingüística computacional d'avantguarda per a mesurar la polarització afectiva d'elit. Aquesta tècnica innovadora permet una observació directa del llenguatge utilitzat per les elits polítiques i la seva contribució a les divisions socials. El capítol investiga a més com diversos factors institucionals i contextuals, com la polarització ideològica d'elit i la volatilitat electoral, es correlacionen amb la polarització afectiva d'elit, proporcionant una comprensió més profunda dels seus impulsors a Amèrica Llatina.

En el segon capítol, la tesi introdueix el nou concepte de "identitat amb el lideratge", redefinint les dinàmiques de les identitats polítiques més enllà de les afiliacions partidistes tradicionals. Revela que, en l'ambient polític distintiu d'Amèrica Llatina, particularment en sistemes presidencials, la identificació amb el lideratge té un impacte més pronunciat en la polarització afectiva en comparació amb la identificació partidista. Aquesta percepció és crucial per a entendre la preeminència dels lideratges polítics sobre les identitats partidistes.

El capítol final d'aquesta tesi examina les conseqüències del retrocés democràtic en la polarització afectiva, emprant un mètode experimento natural. En aquest capítol, utilitzo la suspensió del referèndum revocatori de 2016 a Veneçuela com un cas d'estudi per a comprendre com el retrocés democràtic influeix en la polarització afectiva. Les troballes revelen efectes asimètrics de les accions antidemocràtiques en la polarització social. És notable que els partidaris del partit governant no alteren les seves avaluacions del grup opositor, fins i tot quan estan exposats a la injustícia processal dirigida a suprimir-ho. Per contra, aquells que s'identifiquen amb l'oposició experimenten un augment en els sentiments negatius. Aquest resultat proporciona una perspectiva matisada de la polarització afectiva en contextos d'erosió



democràtica, destacant l'impacte diferencial dels desenvolupaments polítics en diversos segments de la societat.

La recerca utilitza una combinació de lingüística computacional, anàlisi de sentiments i dades d'enquestes per a analitzar patrons de polarització afectiva a nivell individual i d'elit. Contrasta aquest fenomen a Amèrica Llatina amb democràcies desenvolupades, ressaltant els desafiaments i complexitats únics de la regió. Les troballes revelen que, encara que la polarització afectiva és una tendència global, la seva manifestació a Amèrica Llatina està influenciada per factors com el paper prominent dels líders polítics i les normes democràtiques en declivi.

Aquesta tesi contribueix a la literatura en evolució sobre la polarització afectiva en llançar llum sobre les seves complexitats en el paisatge polític únic d'Amèrica Llatina. Desafia i refina les teories existents, oferint noves perspectives sobre les dinàmiques de la polarització afectiva en entorns polítics no bipartidistes i volàtils. La recerca presentada aquí estableix les bases per a futurs estudis en el camp i millora la nostra comprensió del comportament polític i els processos democràtics a Amèrica Llatina.

Paraules clau: polarització afectiva, polarització, mètodes quantitius, experiment natural, Amèrica Llatina.

## Resumen

Esta tesis doctoral expande significativamente la perspectiva comparativa sobre la polarización afectiva, enfocándose particularmente en el contexto poco explorado de América Latina. La polarización afectiva, definida como el grado de negatividad hacia partidarios políticos opuestos y positividad hacia copartidarios, ha sido predominantemente estudiada en el contexto de Estados Unidos y Europa. Sin embargo, esta investigación busca comprender sus dinámicas en el distintivo panorama político de América Latina, caracterizado por sistemas partidarios volátiles, una democracia en declive y un creciente personalismo. La tesis adopta un enfoque integral, explorando la polarización afectiva desde tres perspectivas.

El primer capítulo presenta un enfoque metodológico innovador, utilizando lingüística computacional de vanguardia para medir la polarización afectiva de élite. Esta técnica innovadora permite una observación directa del lenguaje utilizado por las élites políticas y su contribución a las divisiones sociales. El capítulo investiga además cómo varios factores institucionales y contextuales, como la polarización ideológica de élite y la volatilidad electoral, se correlacionan con la polarización afectiva de élite, proporcionando una comprensión más profunda de sus impulsores en América Latina.

En el segundo capítulo, la tesis introduce el novedoso concepto de "identidad con el liderazgo", redefiniendo las dinámicas de las identidades políticas más allá de las afiliaciones partidistas tradicionales. Revela que, en el ambiente político distintivo de América Latina, particularmente en sistemas presidenciales, la identificación con el liderazgo tiene un impacto más pronunciado en la polarización afectiva en comparación con la identificación partidista. Esta percepción es crucial para entender la preminencia de los liderazgos políticos sobre las identidades partidistas.

El capítulo final de esta tesis examina las consecuencias del retroceso democrático en la polarización afectiva, empleando un método experimento natural. En este capítulo, utilizo la suspensión del referéndum revocatorio de 2016 en Venezuela como un caso de estudio para comprender cómo el retroceso democrático influye en la polarización afectiva. Los hallazgos revelan efectos asimétricos de las acciones antidemocráticas en la polarización social. Es notable que los partidarios del partido gobernante no alteran sus evaluaciones del grupo opositor, incluso cuando están expuestos a la injusticia procesal dirigida a suprimirlo. Por el contrario, aquellos que se identifican con la oposición experimentan un aumento en los

sentimientos negativos. Este resultado proporciona una perspectiva matizada de la polarización afectiva en contextos de erosión democrática, destacando el impacto diferencial de los desarrollos políticos en varios segmentos de la sociedad.

La investigación emplea una combinación de lingüística computacional, análisis de sentimientos y datos de encuestas para analizar patrones de polarización afectiva a nivel individual y de élite. Contrasta este fenómeno en América Latina con democracias desarrolladas, resaltando los desafíos y complejidades únicos de la región. Los hallazgos revelan que, aunque la polarización afectiva es una tendencia global, su manifestación en América Latina está influenciada por factores como el papel prominente de los líderes políticos y las normas democráticas en declive.

Esta tesis contribuye a la literatura en evolución sobre la polarización afectiva al arrojar luz sobre sus complejidades en el paisaje político único de América Latina. Desafía y refina las teorías existentes, ofreciendo nuevas perspectivas sobre las dinámicas de la polarización afectiva en entornos políticos no bipartidistas y volátiles. La investigación presentada aquí sienta las bases para futuros estudios en el campo y mejora nuestra comprensión del comportamiento político y los procesos democráticos en América Latina.

Palabras clave: polarización afectiva, polarización, métodos cuantitativos, experimento natural, América Latina.



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# 1 Introduction

Affective polarisation, that is, the extent to which citizens exhibit increased negativity towards opposing political partisans while view positively their co-partisans (Iyengar et al., 2019) originated as a concept within the context of the United States and has subsequently found resonance within European multiparty systems. Yet, an essential question emerges: is affective polarization a global phenomenon, or does it manifest only in developed democracies? If it is context-dependent, what are the underlying factors that drive it? These fundamental questions form the cornerstone of this dissertation. While much of the existing literature on affective polarisation has predominantly concentrated on the United States (M. Hetherington & Rudolph, 2014; Iyengar et al., 2019; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015) and Europe (Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2021), this dissertation focuses on Latin America. The rationale behind this shift lies in the assertion that affective polarisation operates differently in this region.

Each region undoubtedly possesses its distinctive traits, yet Latin America stands out as a particularly intriguing area for the study of affective polarisation. Latin America faces with the challenge of less stable and more volatile party systems (Moraes & Béjar, 2023), factors that profoundly influence the construction of partisan identities (Lupu, 2011)—an essential concept in understanding affective polarisation. In this region, multi-party systems are mostly presidential regimes, further distinguishing it from its counterparts. Moreover, over the past two decades, Latin America has experienced a more pronounced decline in democracy than any other region (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023).

In this thesis, I have undertaken a comprehensive examination of this issue from three distinct perspectives. Each perspective is aimed at addressing the initial question: What factors determine affective polarisation in Latin America? These perspectives are designed to overcome the unique challenges presented by Latin America's complex political landscape.

First, I propose a comprehensive examination of the dynamics at the level of political elites—a crucial source of affective polarisation often overlooked in the existing literature. My objective is to discern how partisan dynamics, electoral systems, and contextual factors collectively determine the affective polarisation of political elites.

Second, I describe patterns of affective polarisation at the individual level within multiparty

systems, while making comparisons between presidential and parliamentary regimes. In response to the challenge of low levels of partisan alignment, I argue that, in Latin America, individuals also construct their political identities around charismatic leaders rather than traditional political parties.

Finally, in the context of Latin America's potential democratic decline, I aim to investigate how this backsliding impacts intergroup hostility. Specifically, I explore how actions by the incumbent designed to undermine opposition parties contribute to an increase in affective polarisation.

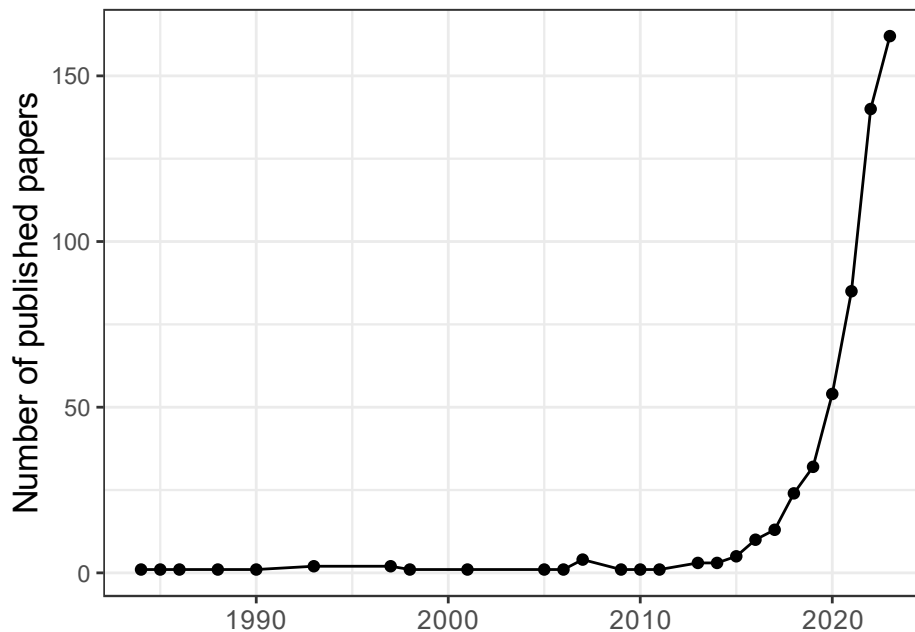
By approaching the issue from these three distinct perspectives, I seek to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of affective polarisation in Latin America, recognizing that its dynamics often differ from those observed in Europe or the United States. This research aims to shed light on the unique challenges and complexities that define affective polarisation within the Latin American context.

Before delving into the individual contributions of this dissertation, it's crucial to understand the growing global interest in affective polarisation. In recent years, this phenomenon has significantly piqued the interest of the social science community. This sudden interest by comparative researchers, it is likely due to its alignment with renewed interests in social groups, cleavage politics, and political identities (Harteveld et al., 2023). As depicted in **Figure 1.1**, the number of papers published on affective polarisation in Scopus over the last three decades indicates a marked increase, particularly from the mid-2010s. Prior to 2010, there was an average of merely one paper published on the subject each year. Post-2010, this average soared to 41 papers annually. These publications span a diverse range of disciplines, extending from the social sciences to psychology and economics, reflecting the multidisciplinary interest and relevance of affective polarisation in understanding contemporary societal dynamics.

This surge in scholarly attention can likely be traced back to seminal works such as those by Iyengar and Westwood (2015), Hetherington and Rudolph (2014) or Huddy et al. (2015) which focus on the rise of this phenomenon in the United States. However, the study of affective polarisation responds to both longstanding traditions and recent developments in political science globally. The last decade, marked by numerous critical political events, has played a pivotal role in this shift. Notable occurrences such as the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, the UK's Brexit referendum, the emergence of extreme right-wing parties

in European parliaments, and the growing influence of left-wing populism in Latin America, have not only reshaped global politics but have also underscored the significance of social identities in political conflict. These developments have heightened concerns about increasing animosity between members of opposing political parties, thereby transforming political conflict from a phenomenon predominantly confined to political elites to a widespread societal issue.

**Figure 1.1 Number of published paper on affective polarisation (1983-2023)**



Source = Scopus abstract and citation database .  
 Available at [www.scopus.com](http://www.scopus.com)

Previous research has established that the rise of affective polarisation is mostly due to a resurgence in party identification (M. J. Hetherington, 2001; Huddy et al., 2015). Building over the social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979) it argues that partisanship can become the basis of social identity such as ethnicity, gender, class, or any other group (Ward & Tavits, 2019). From a social identity theory perspective, individuals create bias around those group, markedly, demonizing the outgroup while strengthening their ingroup favouritism. Some scholars have argued that higher levels of affective polarisation because of the alignment of political identities with other identities (i.e., social sorting) (Harteveld, 2021; Mason, 2016). Others suggest that elite ideological polarisation and ideological sorting are major contributors to this polarisation (Banda & Cluverius, 2018; Webster & Abramowitz, 2017), alongside a variety of factors like the emergence of right-wing populist parties (Harteveld et al., 2021), the consumption of partisan and social media, internet access, political campaigns, and negative advertising



(Levendusky, 2013; Levendusky & Malhotra, 2016), and the emergence of post-materialist values challenging established cultural identities (Fukuyama, 2018; Huddy et al., 2015; Inglehart, 2009).

Most research on affective polarisation has predominantly concentrated on the United States, where there has been a notable upward trend, primarily driven by increasing hostility towards members of opposing parties (Iyengar et al., 2019). However, affective polarisation is not a phenomenon unique to the American context. Descriptive studies show that the levels of affective polarisation in the United States are average compared internationally, highlighting the phenomenon's broader relevance (Wagner, 2021; Westwood et al., 2018). Despite applying the concept beyond America has proven challenging because of the complex array of political identities and potential adversaries (Harteveld, 2021), the body of comparative literature on affective polarisation has flourish in the recent years. However, this increased research on affective polarisation in multiparty systems has focus on Europe, where research has made significant strides in adapting the concept to such political contexts.

This dissertation makes a significant contribution to the evolving body of comparative literature on affective polarisation by focusing on the relatively unexplored context of Latin America. The region, with its diverse political landscape characterized by predominantly non-bipartisan presidential systems, presents distinct challenges for scholarly inquiry. Additionally, the recent surge in populism in Latin America, marked by leaders using polarising rhetoric as a strategic tool for mobilisation and deepening societal divisions (McCoy & Somer, 2019), creates a unique environment for study. This situation is further compounded by the noticeable decline in traditional party identification and the rise of alternative mobilising factors, such as religion, education, and indigenous background, reshaping political affiliations and dynamics (Layton et al., 2021; Rivas, 2008).

The primary aim of this dissertation is to thoroughly investigate the applicability and operationalisation of affective polarisation within various political settings across Latin America. This research specifically addresses the challenge of defining how citizens delineate their in-group and out-group affiliations in a context characterized by low levels of partisanship and alignment, coupled with high electoral volatility. This exploration is pivotal in contributing to the expanding body of literature on affective polarisation. It is particularly vital for understanding the intricacies of affective polarisation in a region undergoing substantial political transformations, where political alignments are fluid, institutionalisation levels are

low, and presidential systems often display a trend towards hyper-personalism. Furthermore, this exploration is crucial in the context of Latin American democracies, many of which have not fully consolidated and have experienced a trend of democratic backsliding in the past decade.

Building upon the intricate political backdrop of Latin America, over three chapters, I delve into various facets of affective polarisation, and make several contributions to this growing comparative literature. In Chapter 1, my collaboration with Associate Professor Camilo Cristancho focuses on elite affective polarisation (EAP), a crucial yet often overlooked source of polarisation. We supply an innovative measure that places language at the forefront, shifting the focus from perceptions to the actual behaviour of elected representatives. This method provides a novel perspective on how language used by political elites contributes to affective polarisation, offering a more direct observation of their impact on societal divisions. Additionally, we explore through different institutional and contextual factors that correlate with EAP, aiming to enhance our understanding of the dynamics and drivers of EAP, particularly in Latin America.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation explores the relationship between affective polarisation and a range of institutional, contextual, and individual variables, focusing especially on political regime types, such as parliamentarism and presidentialism. This chapter revisits partisan identification across regime types and introduces the concept of *leadership identification* as an alternative framework for political identity in Latin America. I provide evidence indicating that leadership identification exerts a stronger influence than traditional partisan identification in presidential regimes. This insight aligns with the broader context of declining party identification in Latin America and underscores the evolving nature of political identities in the region.

Finally, Chapter 3 examines affective polarisation in the context of democratic backsliding. Here, I explore the impact of anti-democratic measures by incumbents on intergroup hostility. The study reveals a nuanced picture: opposition members (the 'losers') exhibit increased animosity towards the out-group following such measures, whereas supporters of the ruling party (the 'winners') do not significantly alter their perceptions of the other group or themselves. This finding highlights the asymmetric effects of undemocratic actions on societal polarisation and contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of affective polarisation in contexts where democratic norms are eroded.

The rest of the introduction is methodically arranged as follows: Initially, I provide a clear definition of affective polarisation, accompanied by an overview of how it has been operationalised in existing research and specifically within this dissertation. Next, I offer a concise explanation of the primary drivers and implications of affective polarisation, focusing particularly on the elements that are central to this study. Subsequently, I explain the reason to focus on Latin America for studying affective polarisation. Then, I outline the distinctive contributions this dissertation makes to the comparative study of affective polarisation. This is followed by a description of the datasets, case studies, and methodologies utilized in the research. Lastly, I present a brief outline of the dissertation's overall structure.

### **1.1 Conceptualisation and measurement of affective polarisation**

First, it is important to make a clear distinction between ideological polarisation and affective polarisation, which are terms that are used frequently, but not interchangeably during this dissertation. Traditionally, polarisation refers to a specific distribution of public opinion in which citizens are concentrated at opposing poles, often to the detriment of those with centrist preferences (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). Polarisation describes an increasing distance between the issue positions of supporters of different parties, so the higher the ideological or programmatic discrepancies, the higher the polarization (Casal Bértoa & Rama, 2021). Similarly, ideological polarisation is often associated with alignment, signifying a growing alienation between party affiliation and ideology, where ideology represents a set of issue positions or values (Comellas & Torcal, 2023). However, the current political climate in many democracies is characterized not just by differences about policy or ideological positions along the left–right spectrum, but more so by conflicts rooted in fundamental social identities (Miller, 2020).

Affective polarisation is defined in this dissertation as the extent to which citizens feel more negativity towards members of the other parties while expressing favouritism for their co-partisans (Iyengar et al., 2019). I use this definition in the dissertation because it acknowledges the dual process of affective polarization. Other definitions in the literature have focused solely on negative feelings towards opponents (e.g. Hartevelt, 2021) which could be interpreted as out-party dislike. What is clear is that there is a deep-rooted emotional basis to this concept.

This dissertation also examines affective polarisation at the elite level. Building upon the definition proposed by Lucas & Sheffer (2023), I define elite affective polarisation (EAP) as

the extent of partisan emotions displayed by elected politicians, encompassing not only hostility but also expressions of positive feelings and loyalty within the political elite. Some researchers have referred to a similar concept as "rhetorical polarisation" defining it primarily in terms of MPs' expressed negativity towards opposition parties in legislative speeches (Ballard et al., 2023; Røed et al., 2023). Yet, the definition proposed in this dissertation acknowledges not only the aspect of outgroup dislike but also the element of ingroup favouritism, which is a critical component of affective polarisation.

Although ideological and affective polarisation are distinct concepts, they are closely linked. Their relation is endogenous and not straight forward (Harteveld, 2021). Increased inter-group hostility does not necessarily correlate with a widening ideological gap between individuals or elites (Druckman et al., 2013). Nevertheless, partisan affect has a significant influence in individuals' perceptions of their party ideological stance (Ward & Tavits, 2019). Moreover, the 'left' or 'right' labels may tend to categorize people as in-groups and out-groups based on their ideological affiliation, highlighting similarities between voters belonging to the same ideological bloc and differences between supporters of different ones (Comellas & Torcal, 2023).

The "object" of affective polarisation is a subject of some ambiguity. Most of the literature understands affective polarisation as assessments (positive or negative) towards fellow citizens or "horizontal" affective polarisation (Areal & Harteveld, 2023). Mirroring this logic, evaluations among representatives, at the elite level, would be another form of horizontal polarisation. However, affective polarization can also encompass evaluations towards other political objects such as political parties, or even political leaders or candidates (Gidron et al., 2020; Reiljan et al., 2023). When attitudes pivot around political objects at different levels, e.g. parties or candidates, the dimension becomes "vertical" (Areal & Harteveld, 2023).

People do differentiate between entities based on individual or party features (Comellas Bonsfills, 2022). For example, individuals often have more positive feelings towards opposing party supporters than towards the party itself and its leader (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019). This dissertation partly addresses this questions. In Chapter 2 it explores factors contributing to the gap between leader affective polarisation in comparison to party affective polarisation, which of sentiments for parties and for voters and in Chapter 3, it examines how democratic backsliding measures affect sentiments toward opposing partisans.

The problem to capture “horizontal” polarisation is mostly due to a measurement problem. The most popular (and widely available) measure of affective polarisation is the feeling thermometer, a survey item which asks respondents to what extent they *like* or *dislike* various parties or party leaders (Wagner, 2021) or (less likely) party members. In comparative research, feeling thermometers towards parties are commonly used, although some studies employ distance measures or trust games. These sentiment scores enable the construction of comprehensive measures that encompass all aspects theoretically related to affective polarization. However, the selection of a specific measure should align with the researcher's objectives and interests. For instance, the spread-of-scores measure better captures opposition between blocs of parties rather than single parties and incorporates respondents without clear attachment to a specific party (Wagner, 2021). In contrast, the mean-distance index is preferable for exclusive partisan identities (Reiljan, 2020).

This dissertation relies on both measures. I employ the spread of scores for examining patterns of affective polarisation in multiparty systems in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, for measuring affective polarisation at the elite level in Chapter 1, I adopt an adapted version of the distance measure of affective polarisation. This adaptation is based on targeted sentiment analysis, which is particularly effective in contexts where representatives are clearly distinguishable by their own party and out-parties. In Chapter 3, I also use separate feelings scales for the respondent's in-group and the reversed feelings scale (measuring negative feelings) for the respondent's out-groups (Comellas & Torcal, 2020). Throughout the dissertation, there is a consistent emphasis on sentiments directed towards parties, their leaders, and their supporters, ensuring a comprehensive and multifaceted exploration of affective polarisation.

Some scholars have opted for using alternative techniques to survey items for measuring affective polarisation to capture it directly. Previous research has employed alternatives such as social distance measures (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2016), implicit association tests (IATs) (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015), and even experimental methods based on trust games (Broockman et al., 2023). Aiming to capture behaviour directly, in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, I employ a state-of-the-art computational linguistic model to analyse targeted sentiments that members of parliament (MPs) direct at other representatives. This methodological contribution aims to overcome the previously discussed measurement challenges that can come from using instruments such as surveys.

## 1.2 Causes of Affective Polarisation

Affective polarisation often finds its origins in inherent perceptual limitations and the perceptual biases stemming from individuals' identification with a particular political party or group, ultimately leading to motivated reasoning (Balinhas, 2023). Humans oversimplify and distort information about the world and the various social groups within it as internalizing the complex nature of the social world is cognitively costly (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). In line with this reasoning, cognitive approaches attribute the causes of polarization to automatic, inherent, and, to some extent, inescapable perceptual biases that are exacerbated by the division of the political landscape into in-groups and out-groups (M. B. Brewer, 1991).

From a social identity theory perspective (Tajfel et al., 1979), group membership can derive in behaviours such as the formation of stereotypes and the development of favouritism within the group (in-group liking), accompanied by negative biases towards those outside the group (out-group dislike) (Hogg, 2001). Experimental evidence shows that in-group bias is an innate psychological function in humans, which, under specific circumstances, can deteriorate into inter-group conflict (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022). In the political landscape, partisanship possesses an expressive nature where individuals adopt their party affiliation as a political identity that becomes a core aspect of self-identification (Huddy et al., 2015). The formation of groups alone can generate intergroup tension (Tajfel et al., 1979), leading to high emotional inter-group competition that only increases the perceived stakes of the intention of the outgroup (Harteveld & Wagner, 2022).

Social identity theory posits that partisan emotions play a role in shaping individuals' perceptions of their own party, including how they perceive its ideological stance (M. B. Brewer, 1991; West & Iyengar, 2022). Individuals highlight their ideological purity, often by viewing the party as extremely aligned with their preferred direction (Ward & Tavits, 2019). Consequently, positioning their preferred party at an extreme ideological point allows partisans to reaffirm the party's value and quality, setting it apart in a positive light (Westfall et al., 2015). Moreover, social identities drive individuals to perceive the outgroup as extreme in the opposite direction. This approach makes ideological disparities with that party more pronounced, facilitates the denigration of the outgroup (Martherus et al., 2021), and allows for the dismissal of their positions as neither mainstream nor reasonable. The underlying rationale for these findings is that ideological polarisation heightens the stakes associated with vote choice and accentuates citizens' propensity to employ motivated reasoning in support of their preferred

electoral option (Comellas & Torcal, 2023). Nevertheless, some studies (Gidron et al., 2020; Reiljan, 2020) have found a weak or inconsistent relationship both at the aggregate and individual level between ideological polarisation and affective polarisation. Therefore, it appears that affective polarisation depends partly, and perhaps predominantly, on factors other than the strength of ideological disagreements between political groups (Harteveld, 2021).

Even though party identification plays a pivotal role explaining affective polarisation, it is important to recognize that the impact of this relationship can vary significantly in countries characterized by high levels of electoral volatility and party system instability. While partisanship is firmly entrenched in the United States and other mature democracies and, in certain cases, can even be passed down across generations, developing countries generally exhibit weaker affiliations with political parties (Ames et al., 2012). Furthermore, over the past two decades, political party leaders have emerged as influential figures who significantly impact political behaviour (Ferreira da Silva et al., 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the figure of leaders as entities that can create political identities themselves.

Leadership is indeed a fundamental aspect of in-groups, as leaders and followers are interconnected roles within a social system defined by shared group or category membership (Hogg, 2001). Group leaders possess the ability to shape political identities through their verbal and nonverbal communication (Huddy & Yair, 2021). Their influential role extends to setting agendas, defining collective identities, and mobilizing people toward shared goals in various social contexts (Hogg, 2001). Consequently, identification with a leader encompasses not only an evaluative or affective component (liking or disliking) but also an intentional factor that determines whether individuals engage in specific political behaviours, such as voting. Partisan loyalties have evolved, moving away from their historical reliance on long-term social and ideological factors, and are now more closely linked to individual attitudes toward prominent figures within political parties (Garzia, 2013). Therefore, if we consider party identification as the process by which an individual adopts the identity of the political party, they feel the strongest affinity for, we can similarly view *leader identification* as a phenomenon where a voter constructs their political identity around the leader they favour most. Consequently, leader identification can be seen not merely as a proxy for partisanship but as an independent variable in in-group identification, one that is not constrained by the need to align with a specific party.

Another identity-based theory highlights how the alignment of political identities with other

social identities intensifies affective polarisation. This form of alignment, called “social sorting” (Mason, 2015, 2016), suggests that the entwining of political and non-political identities amplifies antagonism towards political adversaries. The increasing alignment of identities influences perceptions of group relations and diminishes “social identity complexity” (M. D. Brewer, 2005). It is recognizing that complexity what prevents groups from appearing homogenous, thereby reducing bias and negative affect towards political out-groups (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). The homogenization of group by alignment of their ideological identities and social composition, including factors such as ethnicity, religion, gender, age, or place of residence, leads to the formation of a psychologically resilient partisan social identity that consolidates into a unified tribe (Mason, 2016) Simultaneously, individuals with highly aligned identities tend to exhibit more hostility toward out-party members, without necessarily undergoing changes in their ideological positions (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022). Beyond the United States, social sorting also appears to be significantly associated with a global trend toward affective polarisation (Harteveld, 2021; Layton et al., 2021).

However, this identity-based explanation does have its limitations. West and Iyengar (2022) found that reducing partisan social identity's saliency led to lower out-group hostility among partisans, suggesting social identity alone isn't the sole cause of affective polarisation. Moreover, Rudolph and Hetherington (2021) examine non-political contexts and found that while in-group liking drives polarization in non-political contexts, out-group hostility becomes dominant in politics, questioning the sole reliance on social identity theory to explain political affective polarization.

Other parts of the literature have focused on citizens-elites dynamics. Existing literature has predominantly concentrated on the ideological distance between politicians from opposing parties as a primary source of mass affective polarisation (M. J. Hetherington, 2001; Rudolph & Hetherington, 2021; Stapleton & Dawkins, 2022). The heightened ideological divisions have led to clearer public perceptions of party ideology, thereby contributing to the development of a more partisan electorate. But previous studies have shown that this relationship between elite polarisation and mass affective polarisation, is a two-directional mechanism. On the one hand, parties may bias their policies toward their own partisans, especially when voters exhibit ingroup responsiveness (Diermeier & Li, 2019). On the other hand, citizens interpret what politicians do (their speeches through media, their ideological positions, and their behaviour towards members of the out-party) as affective cues that fuels their partisan animosity



(Stapleton & Dawkins, 2022). A nuanced understanding suggests that citizens might mirror not only the ideological positions but also the emotional dynamics between politicians. Druckman and colleagues (2013) already argued that party cues only wield influence when parties present equally compelling arguments, prompting individuals to seek guidance beyond substantive issues. This argument is also supported by recent experimental evidence that suggests that rather than policy cues, affective cues from elites are the primary drivers of citizens' affective states (Huddy & Yair, 2021).

Elections also play an important role in affective polarisation as they epitomize the moment of maximum political conflict (Hernández et al., 2021). Previous research shows that electoral campaigns can intensify affective polarisation, marked by an escalation in positive sentiments towards in-group members alongside heightened negative feelings towards out-group members (Rodríguez et al., 2022). Specifically, in the context of U.S. presidential elections, Sood and Iyengar (2016) have demonstrated that partisans exhibit increasingly hostile affective evaluations of the opposing party's presidential candidate after exposure to electoral campaigns, particularly negative advertising. Conversely, Hernandez et al. (2021) show that elections act as a catalyst, temporarily polarising feeling toward parties by activating partisan identification and accentuating perceived ideological differences between parties. But after elections, citizens gradually depolarise as they become less strongly identified with their party and less engaged in political issues.

Some authors have also focus on institutional factors that drive affective polarisation. Reiljan et al. (2023) explored the patterns of affective polarisation between presidential and parliamentary regimes. They found sentiments directed towards political parties and their leading candidates are often comparable, and in some instances, polarisation towards the candidates can be more pronounced presidential regimes. Furthermore, they show that the presence of a greater number of significant parties tends to dilute the polarising impact of these leaders. Finally, they show that countries with efficiently functioning governments tend to exhibit lower levels of affective polarisation. This proves that institutional and contextual factors play a role determining partisan hostility.

### **1.3 Latin America in comparative perspective**

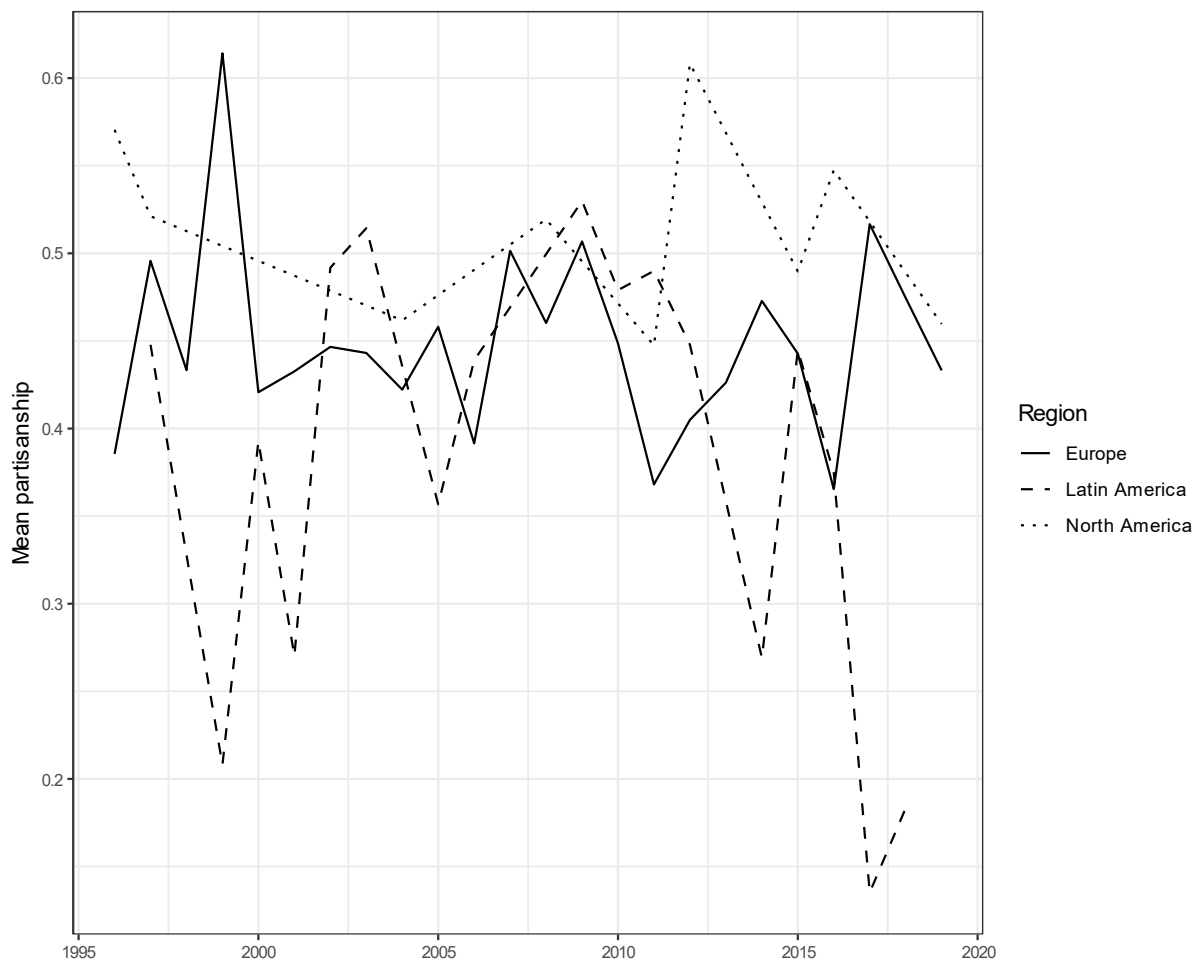
Building on the foundational understanding of affective polarisation and its causes as established in the preceding sections, it becomes imperative to delve into the exploration of

this phenomenon within the unique context of Latin America. This focus is not only a venture into a relatively uncharted territory in the literature but also a necessary expansion of the conceptual framework of affective polarisation beyond the traditional confines of developed democracies. While affective polarisation seems to be a global trend (Gidron et al., 2020; Reiljan et al., 2023), the way these dynamics unfold in the Latin American context offers a fresh perspective and new insights into the broader understanding of this phenomenon.

The previous sections highlighted that a significant portion of the affective polarisation literature is grounded in identity-based theories centred on party identity. This dissertation confronts a pivotal challenge in the Latin American context: the region's comparatively weak party systems. This characteristic of Latin American political landscapes, where party alignments are tenuous and the formation of robust party identities is a more complex and uncertain process, calls for a reevaluation of the traditional frameworks used to understand affective polarisation. The prevalent theories, which often rely on the assumption of strong party systems as seen in many developed democracies, may not fully encapsulate the dynamics at play in Latin America. Here, the fluidity of party allegiances and the costliness of identity formation within party structures present unique circumstances that could shape affective polarisation in ways distinct from more stable political contexts.

While partisanship is well established in the United States and other advanced democracies and, in some cases, may become intergenerational, adherence to political parties is generally weaker in developing countries (Ames et al., 2012). In Latin America, alignment levels tend to be lower (Carreras et al., 2015), but they are not absent. This comparatively lower level of party identification in Latin America can be attributed to the region's frequent political and socioeconomic shifts that reshape the relationships between parties and citizens (Carreras, 2012), disrupting traditional loyalties and rendering party identification more fluid and transient. Additionally, the region's history of political fragmentation and high electoral volatility further destabilizes party systems (Mainwaring & Su, 2021). The abundance of parties and frequent electoral changes challenge the formation of strong, enduring partisan ties (Moraes & Béjar, 2023). In such environments, voters may prioritize immediate factors like candidate charisma or specific policy proposals over long-standing party allegiances (Singer, 2016).

**Figure 1.2 Mean levels of partisanship by region**



Source = Average levels of partisanship reported on modules 1 to 5 from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)

**Figure 1.2** shows the mean levels of partisanship by region. There is no doubt that throughout Latin America, citizen satisfaction with political parties is low<sup>1</sup>. Although a similar crisis of legitimacy exists in most advanced and industrialized democracies, in Western Europe and North America, party systems have remained rather stable over the past 30 years (Carreras, 2012). There's still a debate on whether, in Latin America, this decrease in trust is an expression of dealignment of the party system – a weakening of the basis of political parties in a structural group- or a realignment of political identities (Carreras et al., 2015). Some scholars have argued that the erosion of faith in political parties has precipitated significant changes within party

<sup>1</sup> Survey data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab shows that political parties are the institution with the lowest level of trust in Latin America. Available at <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop>

systems, ultimately paving the way for the rise of anti-system parties (Handlin, 2018; Lupu, 2011). This evolving political landscape, characterized by weakened traditional allegiances, has become increasingly susceptible to affective polarisation.

Political elites, recognizing the potential to deepen allegiance through emotional and identity-based appeals (Levendusky, 2013), often exploit social identities to intensify these divisions. Elites benefit from existing societal divisions to emphasize differences between competing parties and construct politically winning coalitions (McCoy & Somer, 2019). This strategy has become necessary in a context of fragmented party systems, where the emotional resonance of identity politics plays a crucial role in shaping political dynamics (Moraes & Béjar, 2023).

In the context of political disaffection and deep structural divisions, Latin America has witnessed the rise of populist leaders from both extremes of the political spectrum, including left-wing figures like Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa, and Pedro Castillo, and right-wing leaders such as Jair Bolsonaro, Jose Antonio Kast, Keiko Fujimori, and Javier Milei. Despite promoting anti-system messages, these leaders took advantage of the party system, often by creating new parties<sup>2</sup> or re-founding traditional ones<sup>3</sup>, to access democratic institutions. Today, parties in Latin America are being built from power (top/down) and not the other way around (Alcántara, 2023). Thus, for addressing affective polarisation in Latin America it might be more accurate to focus on political leaders rather than political parties.

In addition, the study of affective polarisation in Latin America must critically examine the role of democratic backsliding in shaping political and social divides. In many Latin American countries, the gradual erosion of democratic norms and institutions has created a stark divide in society, delineating clear groups of 'winners' (autocratic incumbents) and 'losers' (opposition). This dichotomy, often fuelled by populist rhetoric and authoritarian tendencies, serves as a potent catalyst for affective polarisation (McCoy & Somer, 2019), exacerbating animosities and deepening societal divisions. Furthermore, the dynamics of democratic backsliding are particularly influential among political elites, affecting their strategies, alignments, and interactions (Graham & Svobik, 2020). The interplay between weakening

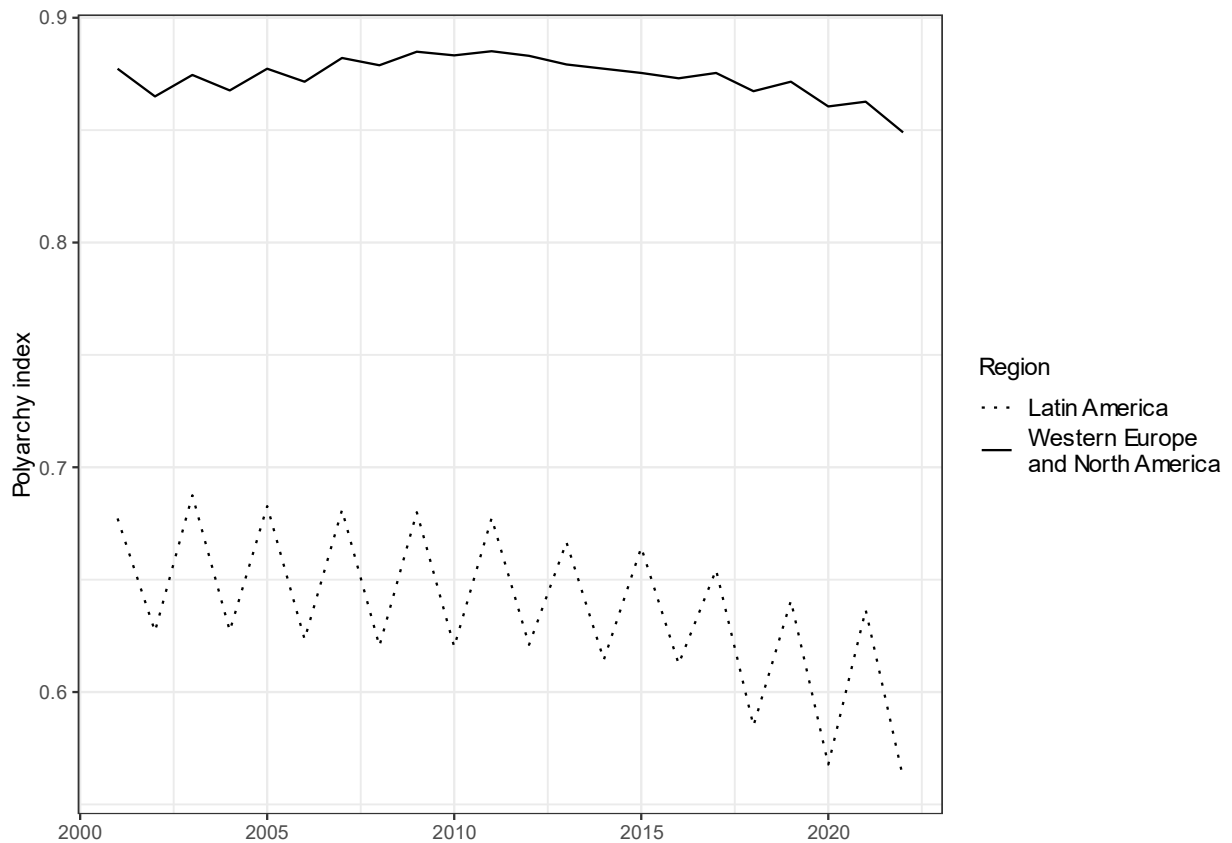
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<sup>2</sup> Chavez formed the Fifth Republic Movement (*Movimiento V República, MVR*); Bolsonaro Alliance for Brazil (*Aliança pelo Brasil*)

<sup>3</sup> Morales re-founded the Movement for Socialism–Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples (*Movimiento al Socialismo–Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos*) and so on and so forth.

democratic structures and elite behaviour in Latin America offers a distinct point of view for understanding affective polarisation, underscoring its implications not only on public sentiment but also on the fabric of political leadership and governance. This aspect of Latin America's political evolution presents a compelling case for analysing how the deterioration of democratic norms can be both a consequence and a driver of affective polarisation, further complicating the trajectory of emerging democracies in the region.

**Figure 1.3 Mean levels of democratic quality by region.**



Source = Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project.  
 Available at <https://www.v-dem.net/>

Drawing on McClosky's (1964) definition of "rules of the game," countries with stronger adherence to norms of free press, social and political equality, political toleration, and justice enforcement might moderate the tendency of representatives to engage in extreme negative sentiments or polarising rhetoric. **Figure 1.3**, drawing on data from the V-DEM project (Coppedge et al., 2021), contrasts the electoral democracy index values between Latin America and Western Europe and North America. This comparison strikingly highlights a significant gap: Latin America exhibits lower values, indicating a divergence in the strength and stability

of democratic norms compared to more developed regions. This disparity is crucial for understanding the dynamics of affective polarisation, especially in relation to how democratic norms are upheld by political elites. Prior research indicates that affective polarisation can undermine adherence to these democratic "rules of the game" by political (Kingzette et al., 2021). Incumbent parties in these less stable democracies might resist norms that limit their power, potentially leading to the erosion of democratic institutions and rule of law (Orhan, 2022). In contrast, opposition parties often uphold these norms to counterbalance incumbent power.

Finally, this dissertation delves into systemic elements influencing affective polarisation, with a particular focus on the pervasive role of corruption, especially pronounced in Latin America. Corruption undermines democratic institutions as it deteriorates one of the most important principles of the system: equality (Vries & Solaz, 2017). In Latin America, weakened institutions and policies have facilitated the rise of corrupt leadership (Blake & Morris, 2009). Corruption can perpetuate the belief that services are accessible only through bribery or influence peddling and that policies are crafted to benefit select groups rather than addressing common interests and demands (Chang & Chu, 2006). When people perceive that institutions fail to respond to their needs, these entities lose legitimacy (Carreras & Irepoğlu, 2013). By creating disparities in access to resources and services, corruption exacerbates social and political divisions, intensifying the sense of injustice and resentment among different groups.

Capturing and punishing corruption is not an easy task. The process of identifying and processing information (selecting the true from the false), as well as attributing responsibility to politicians, is complex (Healy & Malhotra, 2013). Additionally, there are partisan biases that cause politicians not to be punished, even despite poor performance or corruption (Anduiza et al., 2013). Voters' impunity to corruption can only generate that this phenomenon spreads further doubt in political institutions, generates greater intergroup distrust, and increase political conflict.

#### **1.4 Contribution of the PhD dissertation**

Chapter 1 of this dissertation introduces a novel measure of elite affective polarisation that prioritizes language as the primary conduit for expressing affective polarisation among political elites in Latin America. Employing state-of-the-art computational linguistics, we provide a dataset to compare quantitatively both ideological and affective polarisation within

parliamentary elites across various Latin American countries. This approach enriches the empirical landscape with detailed evidence of polarisation's scope and intensity, complementing traditional measures derived from expert assessments, population surveys, and policy position analyses.

Methodologically, the research pioneers a unique approach to studying elite affective polarisation by examining direct interactions between MPs. This method addresses the limitations of traditional thermometer scales and survey items (Gidron et al., 2022), providing a more nuanced exploration of elite affective polarisation. Empirically, it delivers a comprehensive cross-country analysis that unveils patterns of affective polarisation among elites, offering insights into the variations and dynamics of polarisation across the region.

Our main argument during this chapter focusses on the incentives representatives have for differentiating themselves from the rest of the party (M. B. Brewer, 1991). These incentives are given by an array of factors, such as heightened elite ideological polarisation, electoral volatility, the size of the party system or the proportionality of the electoral system. Nevertheless, the contextual factor, meaning the quality of democracy plays an important role here, as democratic norms constraint politicians from being excessively aggressive between each other (Ilie, 2004). We find that, contrary to our expectations, electoral volatility and the characteristic of the electoral system hold a consistently negative effect on EAP across all models. We do confirm that high levels of elite ideological polarisation hold a positive relationship with EAP. We also confirm that higher levels of democratic quality exhibit a negative relationship with EAP, indicating that more democratic and liberal systems may cultivate a less polarized elite environment.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation presents a thorough examination of the determinants of affective polarisation, offering valuable insights at both individual and institutional levels. First, I make a theoretical contribution, introducing the concept of "leadership identification," an essential dimension for understanding modern political identities. This concept transcends mere affective evaluations of leaders, integrating an intentional factor that influences political behaviours like voting. This theoretical advancement enriches the discourse on political identities, emphasizing the evolving role of leaders in shaping political landscapes. The research underlines the pivotal roles of leadership identification and the characteristics of the political system, especially in presidential systems. In Latin American contexts where presidential regimes are common, the influence of leader identification on affective

polarisation is particularly pronounced.

Furthermore, the chapter makes important empirical contributions as highlights substantial differences across countries, particularly noting that parliamentary systems exhibit higher levels of party affective polarisation (PAP), while presidential regimes display greater leader affective polarisation (LAP). This suggests a more pronounced role for political leaders over parties in presidential systems. The study uncovers a strong positive relationship between perceptions of corruption and affective polarisation. This finding indicates that perceived corruption fosters feelings of injustice and unequal benefits, contributing significantly to affective polarisation.

Lastly, Chapter 3 significantly enhances our understanding of how democratic backsliding, particularly through anti-democratic policies enacted by incumbents, can influence polarisation in societies already marked by divisions. This chapter's findings offer valuable insights into the complexities of political polarisation within undemocratic contexts, thereby making a notable contribution to the literature on affective polarisation and democratic backsliding. It argues that fraudulent strategies in elections can amplify negative feelings between different societal groups. The study reveals a marked difference in how such anti-democratic policies intensify out-group dislike among members of the opposition (losers), in contrast to the attitudes of incumbent party supporters (winners), which largely remain unaffected. This observation challenges the prevalent assumption that voters' concern for electoral fairness is universal, highlighting the intricacies of affective polarisation in contexts lacking democratic norms and underscoring how perceptions and reactions to unfair electoral practices are significantly influenced by whether one's preferred party is winning or losing. The research demonstrates that political polarisation is shaped by a multitude of factors, encompassing both emotional and societal dimensions, with the winner-loser status playing a critical role in shaping these attitudes.

## **1.5 Data and methods**

In this dissertation, I employ a variety of innovative methodologies and diverse data sources to comprehensively explore the complex nature of affective polarisation and its driving factors across different political contexts. Each chapter is methodologically tailored to best suit the specific dynamics of affective polarisation being examined. This multi-faceted approach not only enriches our understanding of affective polarisation, contributing significantly to the depth



of existing literature, but it also aims to overcome the methodological challenges traditionally encountered in measuring affective polarisation. By adopting this strategy, the research provides more robust and nuanced insights, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

Chapter 1 employs state-of-the-art computational linguistics techniques to measure elite affective polarisation, focusing on the speeches and statements made by Members of Parliament (MPs). The comparative data on elite polarisation is primarily derived from tweets, encompassing a comprehensive sample of 3,663 MPs from eight Latin American countries over multiple legislative terms from 2010 to 2023. These countries include Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The methodology pivots from traditional affective polarisation studies that rely on survey data. Instead, it utilizes sentiments expressed in tweets as indicators of positive and negative feelings. The analysis employs targeted sentiment analysis to quantify the polarity towards an MP mentioned in a tweet. The algorithm used is based on RoBERTuito, a pre-trained language model for social media text in Spanish (Pérez et al., 2021). This model is adept at learning from annotations at the target level, a crucial factor for accurate sentiment analysis.

For measuring the main explanatory variables in Chapter 1, I employ machine learning to measure elite ideological polarisation. Following Peterson and Spirling (2018), this approach involves a Naïve-Bayes supervised model to analyse MPs tweets. The algorithm's capability to predict party affiliation based on tweet content serves as an innovative measure of ideological polarisation, with higher prediction accuracy indicating clearer ideological divides.

To supplement this primary measure, secondary data sources are utilized for additional independent variables. These include data from the 2020 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Latin America (Martínez-Gallardo et al., 2023) for party elites' ideological positions. For electoral volatility, we rely on the Mainwaring and Sun's (2021) Latin American Electoral Volatility Dataset (LAEVD) and for the average district magnitude is derived from the 'Democratic Electoral Systems Around the World, 1946-2020' dataset (Bormann & Golder, 2022).

To identify correlations between elite affective polarisation with any of the explanatory variables, we perform ordinary least square (OLS) regression with country standard errors by country/legislative term. This statistical approach allows for robust analysis across different countries and legislative periods, accounting for country-specific variations and temporal

dynamics.

Chapter 2 relies on data sourced from modules 1 to 5 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)<sup>4</sup>. This dataset includes nationally representative post-electoral surveys that feature like-dislike scales for both political leaders and parties<sup>5</sup>. These data are used to compare LAP to PAP in seven Latin American countries represented in the survey—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay—alongside 31 European democracies, the United States, and Canada. For cross-national comparisons, the methodology follows Reiljan’s (2020) approach, which estimates vote shares based on the results of the latest parliamentary elections. This method allows the affective polarisation measure to potentially capture all preferences, as more parties are typically running in these elections. In cases where parliamentary election data are unavailable, presidential election vote shares are used.

I rely on secondary sources to measures of the main explanatory variables I use in Chapter 2. For categorizing the type of regime of every country in the sample I use Bormann and Golder’s (2022) Democratic Electoral Systems (DES) dataset which provides information on electoral rules, party system and type of regime. For addressing any concern of Perception of corruption comes from the World Governance Indicators (WGI), whose series starts in 1996. The index ranges from -2.5 (high perception of corruption) to 2.5 (clean) as scores are standard deviations with respect to the world mean (Kaufmann et al., 2009).

In Chapter 2 of the dissertation, the identification strategy utilizes a two-phase analytical approach to explore the dynamics of affective polarisation at the individual level between and within different types of regime. In both phases, I use linear regression models (OLS) with cluster-corrected standard errors by country. The difference arises on the matter of segmenting the data. In the first phase, I use interaction terms at the individual level to examine how party and leader identification influence affective polarisation across different political regimes. The second phase I segment the sample by political system, focusing on individual-level variations within each type.

Chapter 3 focuses on the impact of anti-democratic policies, specifically those employed by ruling authorities to suppress opposition, on political polarisation. This chapter offers an in-

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<sup>4</sup> Data available at: <https://cses.org/data-download/>.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from some surveys included in module 2 that do not incorporate scales concerning leaders.

depth study of the suspension of the 2016 recall referendum on Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. This event serves as a critical example of an anti-democratic policy and provides a unique opportunity to explore its consequences on polarisation in a context transitioning towards autocracy. The dependent variables in this study include affective polarisation and perceived societal polarisation, with data sourced from the AmericasBarometer 2016<sup>6</sup>. This survey data is particularly relevant as it was conducted during the time of the suspension, providing a real-time snapshot of public opinion and sentiment. The causal identification strategy is a natural experiment. Following Muñoz et al. (2020), I exploit the unexpected timing of the event that randomly assigns survey respondents into treatment and control groups. This grants us to compare the responses of the interviewees: Before the event (control group) vs. after the event (treatment group). This way I can estimate the causal impact of this anti-democratic measure on feelings between in-group/out-group members and the perception of societal polarisation.

## **1.6 Structure of the PhD dissertation**

This dissertation is structured as follows. In Chapter 1, we focus on affective polarisation at the elite level. Here, Associated professor Camilo Cristancho and I propose a novel measure for Elite Affective Polarisation (EAP) and engage in a comprehensive discussion about the factors that could be related to this phenomenon. This chapter offers insights into how polarisation manifests among political elites, particularly in the unique context of Latin American political systems.

In Chapter 2, the dissertation delves into the institutional and contextual factors driving affective polarisation at the individual level. A significant addition to this exploration is the introduction of 'leadership identification' as a concept. This theoretical contribution is pivotal in understanding how individuals may adopt party leaders as alternative political identities, moving beyond traditional partisanship. This approach provides a foundational understanding of the conditions under which affective polarisation flourishes among voters, considering the influence of both political institutions and societal contexts.

Chapter 3 addresses the consequences of democratic backsliding on affective polarisation. Utilising a quasi-experimental method, this part of the dissertation aims to establish causal

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<sup>6</sup> Survey data from the AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab. Available at

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop>

relationships, shedding light on how anti-democratic policies, such as the suspension of the 2016 recall referendum on Nicolás Maduro, impact affective polarisation in society.

Finally, in the Conclusions I summarize the main findings and implications of this dissertation. This chapter provides a critical discussion of the dissertation's limitations and offers suggestions for future research. This concluding chapter synthesises the insights gained from the research, highlighting the significance of the findings for both academic understanding and practical applications in policy and political discourse.

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## **2 Chapter 1: A comparative analysis of elite affective polarisation in Latin America: a computational linguistics approach to affective and ideological polarisation**

### **2.1 Introduction**

At the very core of democracy lies the idea of competition and conflict between political parties with opposing ideas (Schattschneider, 1960). In an ideal model of democracy, political conflict would revolve around the different programmatic positions political actors take on political issues on a scale between agreement and dissent (Skoog, 2019). However, recent work has shown that elites are also susceptible to be affective polarised (Ballard et al., 2023), even at greater levels than that of the public (Enders, 2021). While affective polarisation commonly refers to the extent to which individuals feel a sense of favouritism towards supporters of their own party and antagonism towards partisans of the other party or parties (Iyengar et al., 2019), elite affective polarisation (EAP) refers to the level of partisan hostility held by elected politicians (Lucas & Sheffer, 2023).

There is a critical research gap regarding affective polarisation at the elite level. Although most of the literature on affective polarisation has predominantly focused on measuring and explaining affective polarisation among citizens (Gidron et al., 2020; Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2020), much less is known about this form of polarisation in political elites (except for Ballard et al. (2023), Enders (2021) or Lucas and Sheffer (2023)). The complex interaction between mass and elite affective polarisation prompts essential inquiries into causation. Is affective polarisation a uniquely mass phenomenon, or do elites also experience polarisation in this manner? What factors drive this distinctive form of polarisation? Understanding these dynamics is crucial, as heightened levels of EAP could profoundly impact democracy.

On the one hand, the potential introduction of partisan biases into crucial decision-making environments, where elected representatives hold legislative responsibilities, is a significant concern as could lead to promoting extreme policies (Lee, 2015). Furthermore, there's a risk that this dynamic not only raises concerns about potential distortions in policymaking but also normalizes the dehumanization of political opponents, a prevalent issue in mass affective polarisation (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022). Such normalization poses a potential threat to the democratic process as it could lead to a breakdown of democratic norms that traditionally

constrain politicians and representatives from being excessively aggressive or hostile towards each other (Ilie, 2004).

On the other hand, if affective polarisation is lower among political elites, it could serve as a mechanism to mitigate partisan hostility. Therefore, unravelling the extent and origins of affective polarisation among politicians stands as a pressing priority for scholars engaged in the study of political polarisation and democratic representation.

In studying antagonistic behaviour within a political system, the optimal approach often involves estimating confrontational or cooperative behaviour based on assessments derived from independent observations, such as roll-call votes (Lee, 2015) or floor speeches (Røed et al., 2023). However, obtaining systematic and reliable observations of this kind is challenging in the context of Latin America due to varying levels of formal institutionalization across countries. As a result, alternative methods are needed to capture and analyse political interactions.

Given these challenges, we examine the direct interactions between Members of Parliament (MPs) on social media. An original dataset comprising tweets from MPs across 8 different countries in Latin America over a 23-year span (25 country–legislature pairs). Social media interactions provide a unique lens through which we can explore and understand the dynamics of political relationships outside the formal restraints of the parliamentary arena. By studying the affective contents in the interactions among MPs from different parties, we aim to gain insights into the nuanced aspects of their relationships, contributing to our understanding of antagonistic behaviour within the political landscape of Latin America. This approach offers a novel perspective on the intricate dynamics of elite behaviour.

This research makes three significant contributions. First, we provide a rich comparative description of affective and ideological polarization at the elite level within and between nine Latin American countries over a 25-year period. Second, we provide a theoretical explanation of elite affective polarisation based on the structural elements of the party system, the national contexts associated with the quality of democracy, and the attributes and behaviour of parties. Third, we introduce an innovative approach to studying elite affective polarisation by focusing on direct interactions between MPs. This method overcomes the challenges associated with

using feeling thermometer scales or other elite survey items<sup>7</sup>, offering a more direct exploration of affective polarisation within political elites.

In the initial section, we provide an overview of the recent discussion on elite affective polarisation, with an emphasis on its origins and implications for democratic systems. Subsequently, we delve into the intersection of electoral competition and emotional dynamics, particularly examining the incentives driving affective interactions among partisan identities. We present three broad types of explanations: Firstly, we explore party-level concerns, such as ideological differences between major parties. Secondly, we examine systemic factors influencing party competition, including electoral volatility, the size of the party system and proportionality. Thirdly, we contend that the quality of democracy significantly moderates elite behaviour. In the results section, we demonstrate that increased ideological separation between elites amplifies elite affective polarisation levels. Conversely, higher levels of electoral volatility and a larger number of parliamentary parties, along with improved democratic quality, appear to diminish elite hostility. Concluding our discussion, we highlight the need for more extensive research into affective polarisation at the elite level, underlining the significance of our findings.

## **2.2 Elite affective polarisation**

In an ideal democracy, political conflict among party elites is expected to centre exclusively on substantive issues (Skoog, 2019). This implies that parliamentary interactions would focus solely on addressing societal problems, with any differences between MPs assumed to be addressed through their respective ideological positions. However, when political conflict takes on an antagonistic nature—seeking to discredit opponents and elevate one's group instead of addressing a problem—it is identified as elite affective polarisation. Although we could think that discrediting the oppositions respond to strategic factors, we argue that MPs' negative sentiments towards out-parties may not solely be strategic but also stem from a profound sense of group identity. This strong group identity is often linked to the necessity of demonstrating loyalty within their own ingroup (Røed et al., 2023), leading to rooted ingroup favouritism and an intensified aversion to rival parties.

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<sup>7</sup> About this discussion, see Gidron et al. (2022) or Areal and Hartevelde (2023).

In this paper, building upon the definition proposed by Lucas & Sheffer (2023), we conceptualize elite affective polarisation (EAP) as the extent of partisan emotions displayed by elected politicians, encompassing not only hostility but also expressions of positive feelings and loyalty within the political elite. Some researchers have referred to a similar concept as "rhetorical polarisation," defining it primarily in terms of MPs' expressed negativity towards opposition parties in legislative speeches (Ballard et al., 2023; Røed et al., 2023). Yet, we prefer our interpretation as it acknowledges not only the aspect of outgroup dislike but also the element of ingroup favouritism, which is a critical component of affective polarisation.

While it is established that mass affective polarisation hinders cooperation between individuals (Berntzen et al., 2023), the implications of its manifestation among political elites could even be more significant. Cooperative dynamics within the elite are crucial for effective governance and policymaking. Previous research has found that high elite affective polarisation leads to legislative gridlock scenarios (Thurber & Yoshinaka, 2015). This erosion of cooperative governance can lead to a legislative environment characterized by hostility and a lack of willingness to find common ground, ultimately hindering the democratic process. Additionally, echoing Lee's (2015) argument for ideological polarisation, intense partisan hostility between elites can lead to the expression of negative affect towards competing parties to signal loyalty to the partisan base or to distinguish oneself from perceived adversaries rather than for the commitment of public good, potentially compromising the quality of democratic representation.

On the other hand, high partisan animosity can contribute to democratic backsliding. Negative emotions directed toward oppositional party members promote political cynicism, incivility, and intolerance (Layman et al., 2006). This dynamic not only raises concerns about potential distortions in policymaking but also normalizes the dehumanization of political opponents, a prevalent issue in mass affective polarisation (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022). Furthermore, this normalization poses a significant threat to the democratic process as it could erode longstanding democratic norms. Traditionally, these norms have restrained politicians and representatives from excessive aggression or hostility towards each other (Ilie, 2004). A prolonged erosion of these norms may lead to questioning the legitimacy of other parties and their members (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018; Orhan, 2022).

Most of the affective polarisation literature is grounded in social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979), where individuals adopt a political identity (e.g., partisanship) as a core aspect of self-

identification. The formation of groups alone can generate intergroup tension (Tajfel et al., 1979) as categorizing individuals into socially constructed groups based on partisanship can lead to the development of negative biases toward the opposing group (out-group dislike), while simultaneously reinforcing favouritism toward one's own group (in-group liking) (Iyengar et al., 2019). Therefore, when referring to -elite- polarisation, is necessary to keep in mind both part of the process (ingroup-favouritism and outgroup-dislike).

The emotional connections elicited by this group identification, drives groups to preserve their distinctiveness from others to uphold their identity and cohesion. As Brewer (1991) explains, for groups to maintain member loyalty, they need to not only fulfil the members' desires for affiliation and belonging within the group but also establish clear boundaries that set them apart from other groups. Elites resort to party cues as expressive elements for reinforcing internal loyalties and differentiating from the other groups (Huddy et al., 2015). Namely, representatives use parliamentary speeches as a platform to clearly define their ingroup and outgroup (Mollin, 2018). Within parliamentary speeches, politicians often seek to distinguish themselves from their party colleagues, either by expressive acts of party loyalty or by employing negative rhetoric specifically targeted at opposing parties (Røed et al., 2023).

Parliamentary speeches and the interactions between politicians serve as key sources of affective polarisation, as they are instrumental in reinforcing group identities and distinctions between different groups. With this understanding in place, it becomes essential to examine the factors that encourage the utilization of this mechanism. Some authors have focused on individual-level factors within parties. Using evidence at the municipal level in Canada, Lucas and Sheffer (2023) find that party identification strength can shape the affective polarisation of politicians. In line with this finding, Ballard et al. (2023) discovered that members of the United States Congress with more extreme ideological views tend to post tweets that are, on average, more polarizing (expressing negative sentiments) compared to their more moderate counterparts. They point out that incumbency status influences the use of polarizing rhetoric. Specifically, they found that members of the opposition party express more negative sentiments towards out-parties than those affiliated with the incumbent party.

Nevertheless, we could argue that EAP is not only determined by individual-level factors but could vary in other systems with different baseline norms of party conflict, consensus-building,



and institutionalization. Lucas and Sheffer (2023)<sup>8</sup> show that distinct electoral systems determine elite partisan hostility.

While the study of EAP has yielded valuable insights most of it is focused on the escalating conflict in the United States Congress (Ballard et al., 2023; Enders, 2021), besides some evidence on Canada (Lucas & Sheffer, 2023), and Norway (Røed et al., 2023). The global reach of affective polarisation, as highlighted by Gidron et al. (2020), Reiljan et al. (2023), and Wagner (2020), requires a broader exploration. Notably, Latin America stands out as a region that merits particular attention due to its unique sociopolitical landscape. Unlike the well-documented cases in North America, Latin American countries exhibit diverse partisan alignment levels, distinct qualities of democracy, and variations in adherence to democratic norms. This prompts two crucial questions: how does EAP vary within a region with different political histories, cultural backgrounds, and institutional frameworks? How is this variation related to the structural elements of the party system, the democratic context, and the attributes and behaviour of parties within and between national contexts?

### **2.3 Elite affective polarisation in Latin America**

Extensive scholarly attention has been directed towards understanding polarisation in developed nations, yet the intricacies and consequences of polarisation in Latin America have received little attention. Considering that EAP is closely related to partisan dynamics, we need to consider that established democracies often showcase stable dynamics in party competition, underpinned by entrenched connections between parties and societal structures (Moraes & Béjar, 2023). However, a distinctive landscape emerges in developing democracies, marked by prevalent weak institutions, often stemming from various manifestations of political instability in these regions (Lupu & Riedl, 2013).

Empirical evidence further emphasises the inherent instability of party systems in emerging democracies. Mainwaring et al. (2017) present compelling data that shows substantial electoral volatility in these contexts, surpassing the levels observed in developed states. The presence of numerous parties and high electoral volatility can make it challenging for individuals to establish strong and lasting partisan attachments (Lupu, 2016). This argument is supported by Mainwaring and Su (2021) who showed that partisanship prevents the appearance of new

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<sup>8</sup> To this date, this paper is still not published.

parties. This aligns with Lupu's argument that significant decreases in partisanship play a pivotal role in the breakdown of parties and supports Seawright's (2012) claim that they are fundamental to the collapse of the system.

These observations carry substantial significance, as existing research suggests that electoral volatility not only shapes the dynamics of political competition but also raises the stakes of the electoral process, both immediately and over the long term (Pacek et al., 2009). Electoral volatility may serve as an electoral manifestation of a broader context of uncertainty and instability within which party competition typically operates (Moraes & Béjar, 2023).

In such contexts, voters may be more likely to base their choices on short-term considerations, such as candidate appeal or follow politicians' emotional cues, rather than long-standing party affiliations. This is especially relevant in Latin America, as partisan alignment levels are lower than developed countries but also vary significantly across countries (Carreras et al., 2015). Political identities revolve around leaders and other identities, rather than well-established party systems (Singer, 2016). Unequal societies, such as those found in Latin America, are more responsive to extreme positions due to strong social conflicts, providing fertile ground for opportunistic elite behaviour (Béjar et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, even when partisan alignment levels are low, this does not mean they are absent. Evidence suggests that elite ideological polarisation in Latin America is shaped by ideological positions concerning two cleavages: the religious and state intervention, along with two dimensions derived from the authoritarian experience — the relationship between the Armed Forces and democracy (Jenne & Martínez, 2022; Rivas, 2008). Moreover, party systems and populism play crucial roles in shaping polarisation dynamics. The rise of these populist leaders likely resulted in increased levels of polarisation and elite hostility (as suggested by Singer, 2016).

In Latin America, political parties often display a reluctance to fully embrace programmatic competition, posing challenges for the measurement of ideological polarisation (Singer, 2016). In contrast to regions with more institutionalized party dynamics, where parties adhere to established norms of participating in structured policy discussions, the absence of such practices in many Latin American countries creates a void of ideological clarity. This hesitancy of political parties to engage in substantive policy debates and articulate clear ideological alternatives in their manifestos contributes to elite affective polarisation in the region as

partisan hostility substitutes ideological differences as a source of party identity.

To confront these challenges, we explore how the structural elements of the party system, the national contexts associated with the quality of democracy, and the attributes and behaviour of parties collectively shape the landscape of elite affective polarisation in this unique political setting.

## **2.4 National, party, and individual factors explaining EAP.**

### ***2.4.1 Elite Ideological polarisation.***

We first focus on the ideological structure of the party system. Previous research on both mass and elite affective polarisation has identified a relation between higher ideological polarisation in the party system and elevated levels of party affective polarisation (Gidron et al., 2020; Wagner, 2020). Increased ideological divergence leads to a more pronounced competition for voter support (Hetherington, 2001). Additionally, as parties become more ideologically polarized, the stakes of political competition increase (Rodríguez et al., 2022). The perceived threat posed by opposing ideologies intensifies the emotional responses of political elites. Experimental evidence has shown that there is a causal relationship between ideological distance and affect, meaning that the greater the ideological distance, the more negative the affect (Webster & Abramowitz, 2017). Parties, striving to differentiate themselves in the political landscape, may adopt more extreme positions to attract specific segments of the electorate. This strategic positioning contributes to an environment where political elites engage in antagonistic behaviour, fostering elite affective polarisation. This is why we should expect that:

*H1. The higher the ideological distance between parties, the higher the elite affective polarisation.*

### ***2.4.2 Electoral volatility and EAP***

Our second hypothesis focus on electoral volatility. Following Moraes and Bejar (2023) argument, unstable levels of partisan support disrupt parties' ability to predict the success likelihood of their competitors, hindering coordination and potentially leading to an oversupply of candidates or parties, and increasing the risk of overlapping policy positions. In such fluid

settings, party labels may carry minimal significance for voters who lack long-term commitments to specific parties, frequently changing allegiances (Lupu, 2016).

In volatile party systems, parties often contend with the possibility of significant, possibly irreversible defeats at the polls, given their limited resources and weak organizations (Torcal & Mainwaring, 2003). Consequently, the degree of electoral stability (or instability) at the party system level becomes a critical contextual factor influencing parties' calculations. The fear of losing votes prompts parties to make electorally risky decisions, adopting polarising strategies to differentiate themselves from rivals. Conversely, in low-volatility environments, where certainty about electoral and long-term prospects is higher, parties tend to be risk-averse, maintaining their current programmatic or ideological positions. We argue that these differentiation dynamics occur both at the ideological and affective levels. Therefore, we expect:

*H2. Electoral volatility is positively correlated to EAP.*

### **2.4.3 Electoral system and EAP**

Our third argument centres on the effect of the electoral system on EAP. Two main variables have been explored over previously in the literature (see Gidron et al (2020) or Reiljan et al. (2023)). The first one focus on the number of competing parties in an election. While the spatial model initially suggested that as parties multiply, the overall polarisation within the party system intensifies (Downs, 1957), the impact of this phenomenon may vary based on electoral dynamics. As the number of parties contesting an election rises, the conventional understanding is that parties tend to converge around the centre. Both previous research on party system polarisation (Curini & Hino, 2012) and mass affective polarisation (Gidron et al., 2020; Reiljan et al., 2023) has shown that as the number of parties increases, the average levels of polarisation tend to decrease. Scholars argue this is because it becomes more challenging to channel emotions exclusively toward one competitor, leading to a dispersion of affect between parties (Gidron et al., 2020).

However, the mechanism and incentives for a politician might vary from the average voter. The convergence effect to the centre is not universal, as some parties might experience “squeezing effects” from others converging from either side (Cox, 1990). This dynamic diminishes the chance of a "surrounded" party gaining votes from voters closer to a competitor. In the context of electoral competition, a squeezed party faces incentives to stand out and secure

votes. To achieve this, politicians may adopt more aggressive strategies and positions to differentiate themselves and attract attention. By doing so, they aim to resonate with specific voter segments, carving out viable electoral niches away from the centre. Based on the strategic behaviour of politicians driven by the goal of securing distinctive positions to maximize electoral appeal, we expect that:

*H3. A higher number of political parties will be related to increasing levels of EAP.*

Another variable commonly explored when studying the effect of electoral rules on polarisation, focus on the electoral rules. This hypothesis states that the higher proportionality level in an electoral system tends to increase the likelihood of extreme party policies (Curini & Hino, 2012). Furthermore, more proportional electoral systems, characterized by lower electoral thresholds, create a more permissive competitive environment. Strategic incentives of parties play a major role in this theory (Cox, 1997). In more proportional systems, parties have greater liberty to advocate their “sincere policy” beliefs, even if these policies are distinctly non-centrist, and still secure legislative seats (Curini & Hino, 2012). The degree of proportionality in electoral systems is largely influenced by the district magnitude. The average district magnitude serves as an independent variable that directly captures the characteristics of electoral systems. Higher district magnitudes result in lower thresholds for securing seats, thereby increasing the likelihood of smaller parties gaining representation and enhancing the proportionality of the electoral system.

This high proportionality may lead to a more polarised elite landscape. As smaller and potentially more ideologically distinct parties gain representation, the spectrum of policy positions within the legislative body broadens, potentially intensifying the affective divides between political elites. Therefore, we expect that:

*H4. EAP is expected to increase as the level of proportionality of an electoral system increases.*

#### ***2.4.4 Contextual (Liberal democracy + electoral democracy)***

Democracy is self-enforcing (Przeworski, 2011). There is no third party to enforce, for example, recognition of elections or to limit the totality of its actions. Democratic norms are expected to regulate party competition (Graham & Svolik, 2020). Previous research has found that affective polarisation erodes the compliance with these “rules of the game” by the elites. Political elites often resist democratic norms because these norms restrict their authority

(Kingzette et al., 2021). This is especially the case for incumbents. Once parties secure substantial electoral victories and gain control over the legislature, they obtain a formidable structural advantage to exploit state resources for the benefit of the ruling party, therefore, eroding democratic institutions and undermining the rule of law (Orhan, 2022). In contrast, the opposition party typically endorses these norms, aiming to curtail the incumbent's power. Consequently, voters receive distinct partisan signals regarding their stance on these norms, depending on which party occupies the executive they tend to support these norms when the opposition party is in power, but not when their own party is (Kingzette et al., 2021).

So far, the literature that has studied the relationship of affective polarisation to democratic norms has identified the problem in elites' use of partisan cues to differentiate themselves from their opponents (Graham & Svobik, 2020; Kingzette et al., 2021). However, it has not looked at the exogenous factors that can moderate this dynamic. If we go back to the classical definition of “rules of the game” as “norms governing free press, social and political equality, political toleration and the enforcement of justice” (McClosky, 1964, p. 364) we could argue that countries where this norm is abided could act as a moderating influence, constraining representatives from expressing extreme negative sentiments or engaging in highly polarizing rhetoric.

In other words, the presence of strong democratic norms could inversely affect the level of affective polarisation exhibited by political elites. This perspective suggests that the strength and quality of democratic norms in a country could play a critical role in shaping the nature and extent of elite affective polarization. Therefore, we argue there is a bidirectional relation between EAP and the quality of democracy. This can be formally proposed as:

*H5: National contexts with higher levels of democratic quality show lower levels of EAP.*

## **2.5 Research design**

### **2.5.1 Data**

This paper employs state-of-the-art computational linguistics techniques to measure elite polarisation, focusing on social media posts of Members of Parliament (MPs). We also use comparative data on elites, and parties from a range of official government sources from each country and from the Variety of Democracies VDEM dataset (REF). Our sample includes 3,663

MPs from eight Latin American countries, encompassing three or four legislative terms per country between 2010 and 2023. The countries covered in our study are Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. A large amount of tweets was collected based on the usernames of MPs from the search and streaming Twitter APIs during the last decade. The entire sample was used for calculating ideological polarization between parties and a sample of ~158k tweets containing direct mentions between incumbent and opposition MPs was used to measure EAP.

### **2.5.2 Method**

In contrast to conventional affective polarisation studies relying on survey data and employing a like/dislike scale, our approach diverges by utilizing sentiments expressed in tweets as indicators of positive and negative affect between parties. Employing a similar method as the one utilized by Ballard et al. (2023), we use targeted sentiment analysis to quantify the polarity towards an MP mentioned in the tweet<sup>9</sup>. This entails a focus on direct mentions of MPs, distinguishing between those from one's own party (ingroup) and those from another party (outgroup). The algorithm used in this analysis is based on RoBERTuito, a pre-trained language model for social media text in Spanish (Pérez et al., 2021). This targeted sentiment model is trained on a dataset of news headlines mentioning presidential candidates in the Argentinian 2019 elections, specifically learning from annotations at the target level instead of assigning a single polarity to the whole sentence (Pérez et al., 2023). The supervision processes show a satisfactory performance of the targeted sentiment classifier, and of our assumption of targeted sentiment as valid proxy for measuring partisan affect following established standards (REF). The partisan affect measures were then used to calculate EAP as described in the following section.

### **2.5.3 Measuring elite affective polarisation using partisan targeted sentiment scores**

For measuring elite affective polarisation, we employ an adapted version of the weighted mean distance from the most liked party, as proposed by Wagner (2020).

Latin American presidential systems vary in the strength of bipartisan tendencies (Alcántara,

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<sup>9</sup> Pysentimiento is available as a pre-trained transformer model in Hugging face:

<https://huggingface.co/pysentimiento/roberta-targeted-sentiment-analysis>

2012), but the government-opposition dynamics is quite similar when studying electoral competition. We consequently assume that focusing on the government-opposition dynamics largely reflects the partisan animosity and EAP of the entire party system. This means that our operationalization of EAP is based on incumbent and opposition coalitions rather than on multiparty dynamics.

This calculation determines the average distance to other parties from an MP's party, weighted by the size of the party, representing the proportion of seats each party holds in the parliament. This adaptation considers that the impact of strong dislike should carry more weight when directed toward larger, more influential parties, as opposed to smaller, less consequential competitors. This is calculated as:

$$Distance_i = \sqrt{\sum_{\substack{m=1 \\ p=1}}^j s_p * (Like_{imj} - Like_{maxij})^2}$$

Where the sentiment expressed in the tweet  $j$  mentioning the MP  $m$ , is denoted  $Like_{maxi}$  to the ingroup and  $Like_i$  for the outgroup parties. These sentiment are then weighted by the size of the respective party  $p$ .

For measuring  $Like_i$  we compute the disparity between positive and negative sentiments for each mention  $m$ , weighted by the electoral size of the party to which the mentioned MP belongs. That is:

$$Like_i = s_p * \sqrt{\sum_{\substack{m=1 \\ p=1}}^m (Positive_{imp} - Negative_{imp})^2}$$

This measure provides insights into how much, on average, an MP's emotional affinity for other parties' deviates from its own in-party liking. While this approach may seem limiting when applied to individuals (Wagner, 2020), as it assumes a primary positive identification with one party as the predominant aspect of affect patterns, it becomes more fitting for assessing elites. When considering politicians, we can reasonably assume a strong identification with the party they represent, given that they were elected under that party's banner. It recognizes that their affective ties are predominantly tied to the party they represent, making the mean distance measure a pertinent and insightful tool for understanding affective polarisation dynamics among political elites.



To test elite ideological polarisation (H1), following Peterson and Spirling (2018), we use a machine-learning approach that captures the extent to which it is possible to distinguish between incumbent and opposition MPs based on their tweets. This method allows us to take advantage of the granularity of the measurement. The study employs a simple Naïve-Bayes supervised algorithm to predict the party affiliation of the author of each tweet in each country and legislature. This approach uses tweets labelled as incumbent or opposition to calculate the predicted probability as the quantity of interest. The study adopts a simple, easily reproducible, and computationally inexpensive model, as suggested by research indicating little model dependence on the results (Peterson & Spirling, 2018). The accuracy of the classifier's predictions serves as an indicator of the easiness or difficulty in distinguishing between the incumbent and opposition, reflecting the level of polarisation. Higher prediction accuracy indicates a higher level of polarisation, as it suggests clear ideological divisions between the two groups (Peterson & Spirling, 2018).

For measuring the rest of explanatory variables, we rely on diverse set of secondary sources. For testing electoral volatility (H2), we use the Latin American Electoral Volatility Dataset (LAEVD) (2021), which represents the most comprehensive compilation of electoral volatility data for this region. The dataset breakdowns volatility into two distinct components: extra-system and within-system volatility. Extra-system volatility is quantified based on the vote share of emergent parties, whereas within-system volatility is characterized by the vote share growth of established parties from the initial election to the subsequent one within an electoral cycle (Mainwaring & Su, 2021). The dataset encompasses parliamentary election data across most legislative periods included in our study's country sample, spanning from 2009 to 2018. For electoral volatility in elections post-2018<sup>10</sup>, we employed the methodology delineated by Mainwaring and Su to ensure continuity and comparability of data.

To assess the impact of the electoral systems on EAP, we first focus on the effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP) (H3) to assess the size of the party system. This party fragmentation indicator is calculated using the Laakso and Taagepera formula (1979), which presents an imaginary number of equally sized parties. ENPP is instrumental in providing

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<sup>10</sup> This is the case for the country/terms: Argentina 2019-2023; Bolivia 2020-2025; Chile 2018-2022, 2022-2026; Colombia 2018-2022, 2022-2026; Ecuador 2021-2026; Peru 2020-2021, 2021-2026, Uruguay 2020-2025; Venezuela 2021-2026

insights into the complexity and fragmentation of the party system, reflecting the dynamics of parliamentary representation. For proportionality of the electoral system (H4), we employ the logarithm of the average district magnitude, as suggested by Taagepera and Shugart (1979). This data is sourced from the 'Democratic Electoral Systems Around the World, 1946-2020' dataset by Nils-Christian Bormann and Matt Golder (2022).

Lastly, the quality of democracy variables (H5) is measured with two indices from the V-DEM project (Coppedge et al., 2023). First, the Liberal Democracy Index which is constructed based on two components (i) a systematic measure of the de facto existence of "polyarchy" (Dahl, 1971) and (ii) the liberal tradition of a country including the rule of law and respect for civil liberties. Second, the Electoral democracy index which accounts for elections to be free and fair, understood as the extensive suffrage; political and civil society organizations can operate freely; not marred by fraud or systematic irregularities; and elections affect the composition of the chief executive of the country.

## 2.6 Results

Before explaining the extent to which national contexts and party systems are associated with EAP, we first explore which are the main patterns of EAP, including the sentiments asymmetries by group, and levels of democratic quality in Latin America for our period of analysis.

### 2.6.1 EAP in Latin America 2010-2023

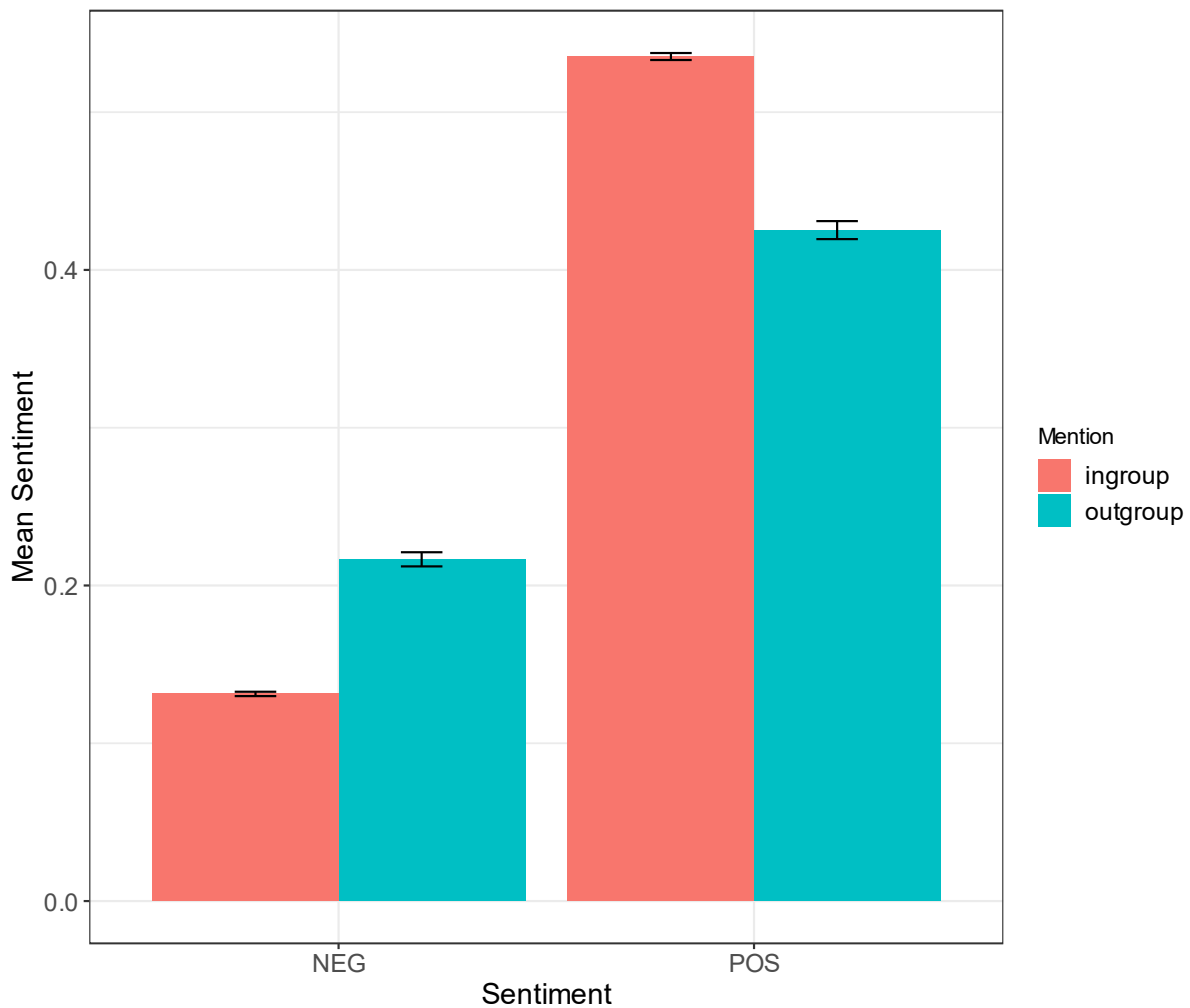
**Figure 2.1** in presents the mean levels of positive and negative sentiments focusing specifically on the targets of mentions in each tweet (either ingroup or outgroup)<sup>11</sup>. The figure reveals several distinct patterns that are consistent throughout most of the analysis period. Firstly, the data aligns with our expectations regarding the nature of sentiment in these tweets. It demonstrates that when parliamentary representatives mention members of their own party (ingroup) on social media, the sentiment expressed is overwhelmingly positive. This reflects a pattern of affirming and reinforcing party unity and solidarity in public discourse. In contrast, when MPs mention members from opposing parties (outgroup), they predominantly express

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<sup>11</sup> A detailed depiction of positive and negative sentiment levels across different countries and legislative terms can be found on appendix 1.

negative sentiments. This pattern is indicative of the competitive and often adversarial nature of political discourse, as discussed in the previous section, where representatives use social media as a platform to criticize or challenge the views and actions of rival parties.

**Figure 2.1 Mean sentiment for country - legislative term.**



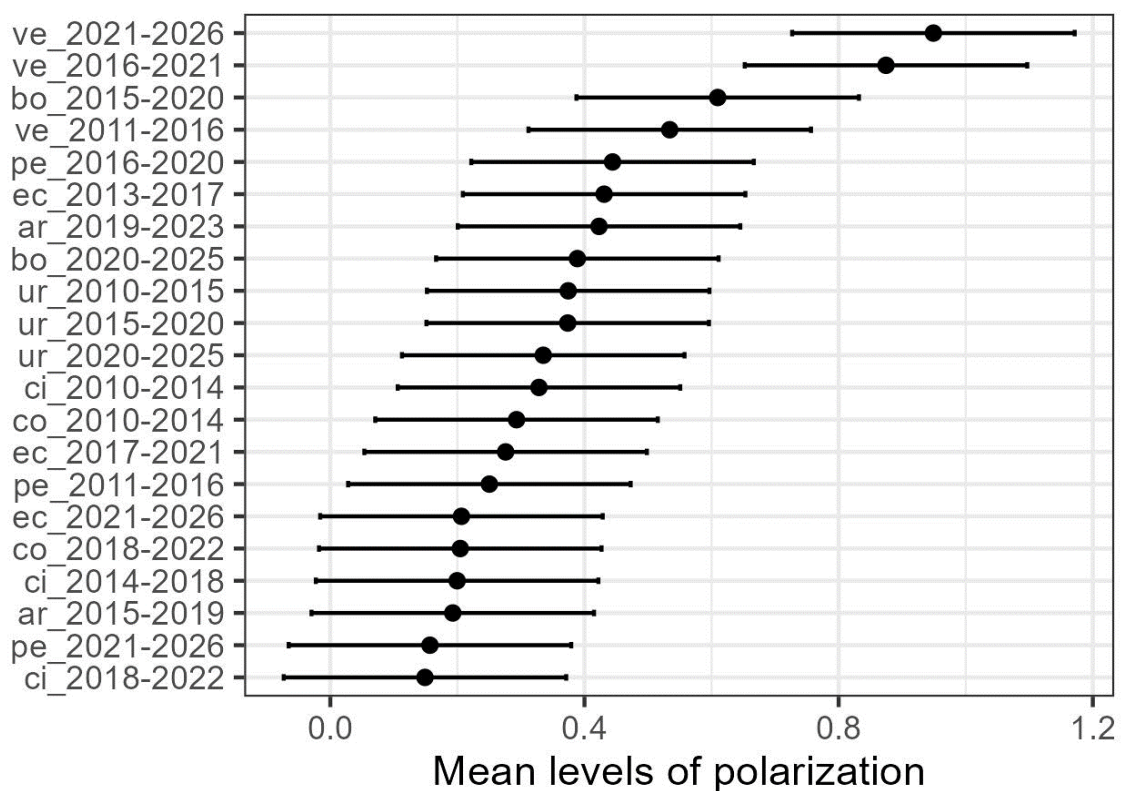
*Note = Whiskers represent 95% Confidence Intervals*

However, alongside these expected trends, the data also uncovers a less confrontational aspect of parliamentary discourse on social media. It suggests that parliamentary representatives frequently use Twitter not only for expressing negative sentiments towards opposing parties but also for conveying positive messages. A qualitative analysis of a sample of tweets, described in detail in the validation section of this paper, show that these messages often take the form of expressions of party loyalty, showcasing the representative's commitment and dedication to their party's ideals and agenda. More interestingly, the data indicates tweets used

as expressions of cooperation with members of the opposing party. Such interactions hint at a capacity for cross-party collaboration and a willingness to work together despite ideological differences.

The EAP measure spans from 0 to 2, where 0 represents the absence of affective polarisation, and 2 indicates the maximum partisan animosity at the elite level. **Figure 2.2** shows the mean EAP levels across countries and legislatures and bars represent variation of the monthly averages. A comprehensive examination reveals notable differences. Venezuela and Bolivia exhibit the highest levels, indicative of heightened elite affective polarisation, while Chile and the most recent legislature of Peru (2021-2026) showcase the lowest levels. Notably, countries such as Uruguay, Chile, and Colombia cluster around the average, exhibiting more institutionalized and stable party systems.

**Figure 2.2: Mean levels of elite affective polarisation by Legislature**

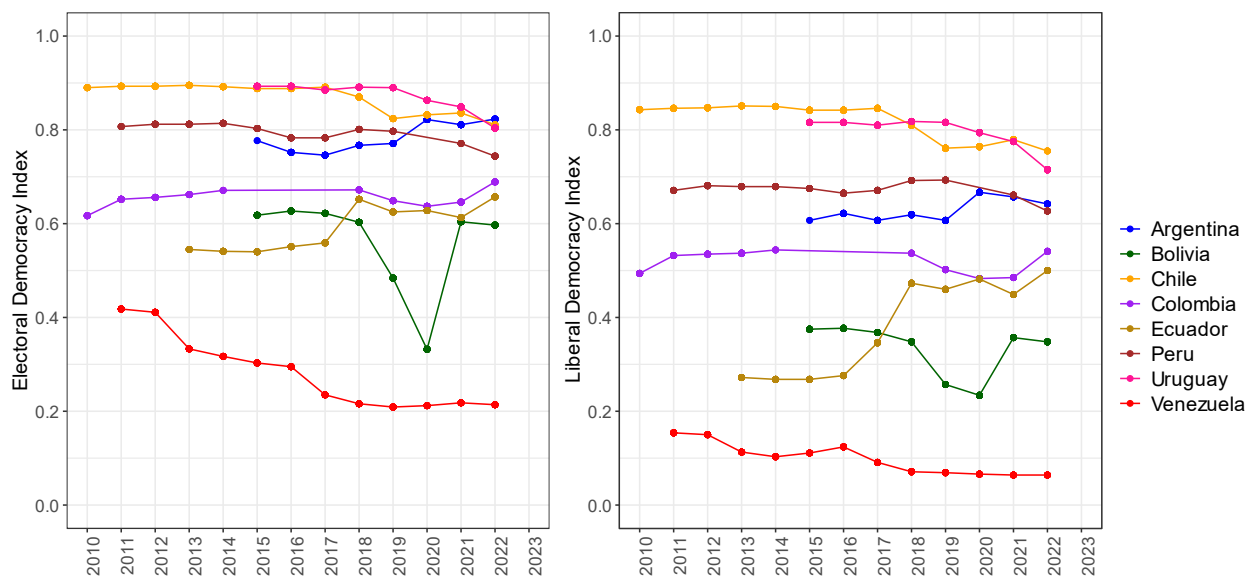


This pattern suggests a potential correlation between higher levels of elite affective polarisation and lower democratic quality in specific countries. The elevated EAP levels in Venezuela and Bolivia, coupled with their political contexts, may signal challenges to democratic norms and stability.

**Figure 2.3** provides a comprehensive overview of the annual evolution of both democratic quality indicators over the last 13 years within our sample countries. These indices, assessed on a scale ranging from 0 (very low) to 1 (very high), reveal considerable heterogeneity among countries. However, that the quality of democracy has exhibited relatively stable patterns within each country in recent years. An exception is Venezuela, which, consistently ranking as the country with the lowest democratic quality throughout this period, has witnessed a decline in its electoral democracy by approximately 0.2 points.

Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay emerge as notable examples of countries maintaining resilient and steadfast democratic structures. Despite Uruguay experiencing a democratic backslide of approximately 0.1 points (10%) across both indicators in recent years, it remains among the nations with the most robust and stable democracies in the region.

**Figure 2.3** Yearly evolution of democratic quality by country



Data source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project (2023)

### 2.6.2 Explaining EAP

We have argued that the structural elements of the party system, the national contexts associated with the quality of democracy, and the attributes and behaviour of parties collectively shape the landscape of elite affective polarisation. To test these expectations, we executed four models, each progressively incorporating the explanatory variables identified in the previous section. This approach allowed us to examine the impact of each variable on Elite Affective Polarisation (EAP) when evaluated in conjunction with various combinations of

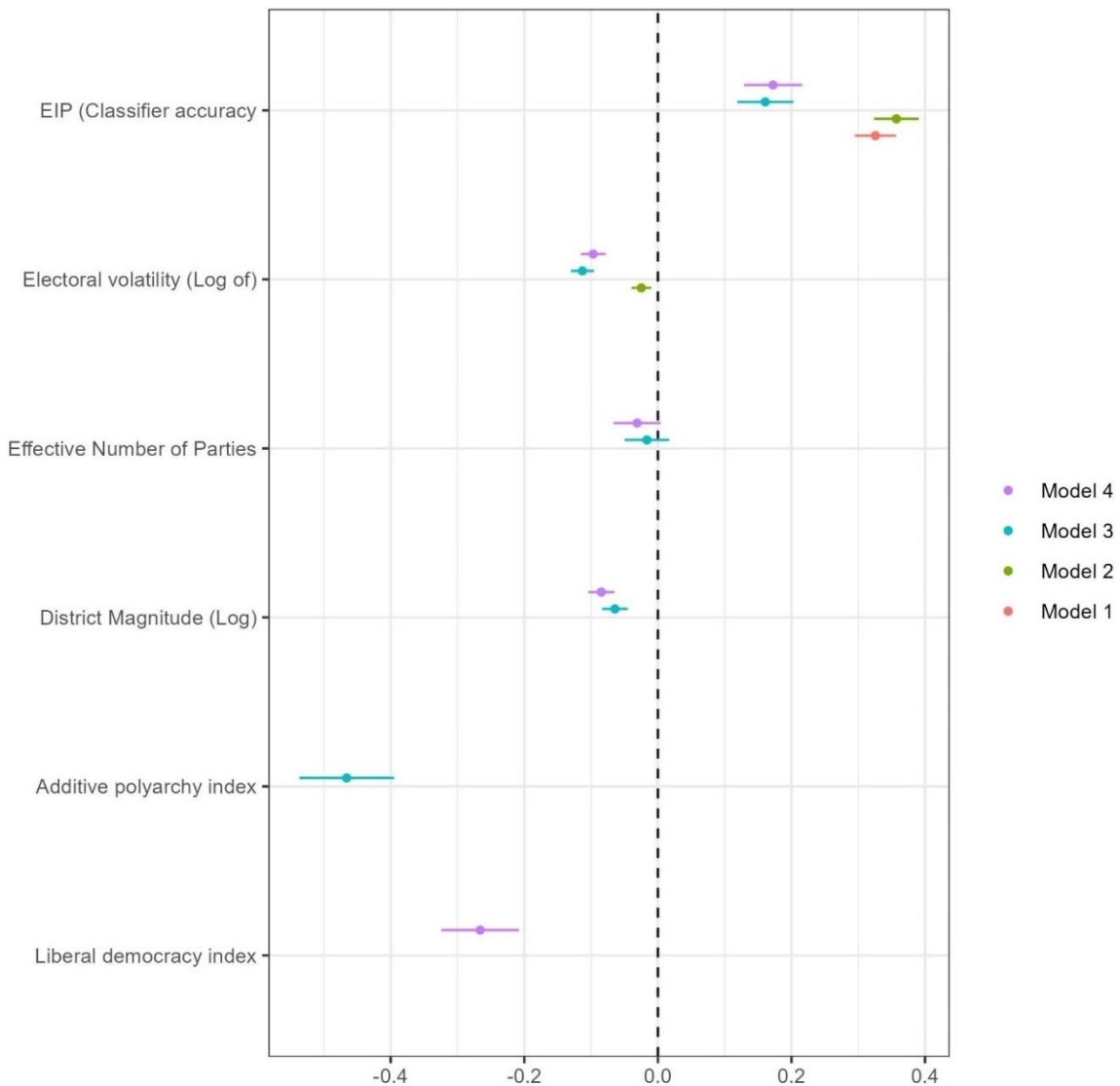
other factors.

**Figure 2.4** in our study presents the coefficients derived from Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models, where we have standardized each variable on a scale from 0 to 1 for clearer interpretability. This standardization ensures that all variables are measured on a comparable scale, facilitating a more straightforward interpretation of their relative effects. *Model 1* is particularly focused on exploring the bivariate relationship between Elite Affective Polarisation (EAP) and Elite Ideological Polarisation (EIP). This relationship is critical as EIP is often cited in literature as a key factor influencing affective polarisation. Consistent with existing evidence and meeting our initial expectations, the findings from *Model 1* reveal a positive and statistically significant coefficient for EIP. This reaffirms the notion that, similar to the patterns observed in the broader public, heightened ideological disparities among political elites contribute to higher levels of EAP.

In *models 2 to 4*, we introduce the measure of electoral volatility, and our analysis reveals a consistently negative effect across all these models. The coefficients range from -0.025 to -0.113, each bearing statistical significance. This finding runs counter to our initial expectations, suggesting that higher electoral volatility correlates with lower levels of EAP. This outcome challenges the assumption that elite polarisation would intensify in response to an abundance of candidates in highly volatile electoral contexts, as elites strive to distinguish themselves through heightened partisan animosity. Instead, our results indicate that in scenarios of greater electoral volatility, affective polarisation among political elites may be less pronounced than anticipated.

In the examination of the effective number of parliamentary parties, a variable included in *models 3 and 4*, our findings are not robust. While a higher number of parties consistently shows a negative effect across all models, it only reaches statistical significance ( $p$ -value  $< 0.1$ ) in *model 4*. This outcome suggests a feeble relationship between the size of the party system and EAP. However, it tentatively supports the notion that a greater number of effective parliamentary parties might be correlated with lower levels of affective polarisation. This aligns with the observations made by Reiljan et al. (2023) in their study of mass affective polarisation. The rationale behind this pattern could be that with a smaller number of parties, the comparative and competitive dynamics between them become more straightforward and intensified, potentially enhancing affective polarisation.

**Figure 2.4 EAP regression coefficients**



Contrary to the initial hypothesis, the results revealed that higher district magnitudes, indicative of more proportional electoral systems, correlate with lower levels of EAP. This suggests that as electoral systems become more inclusive and representative, facilitating a greater diversity of parties and viewpoints, it does not necessarily lead to heightened affective polarisation among elites. It implies that, in more proportional systems, the presence of a wider array of parties and viewpoints requires engagement with a broader set of perspectives. Such engagement could potentially mitigate extreme polarisation, as it requires negotiation, compromise, and an understanding of diverse viewpoints. Moreover, under a “Lijphartian” perspective (1997), the diverse party landscape in proportional systems might require more coalition-building and cross-party collaboration, which could encourage more moderate, less

polarising rhetoric and behaviours among political elites.

Lastly, our finding supports our hypothesis about robust democratic norms restraint of political elites from engaging in extreme negative sentiments or polarizing rhetoric. The analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between indicators of democratic quality, specifically polyarchy and liberal democracy indices, and the level of EAP. This pattern suggests that in countries where democratic norms are well-established and adhered to, political elites demonstrate lower levels of affective polarisation. This outcome aligns with the notion that strong democratic institutions and norms can effectively temper the polarizing tendencies of political elites, leading to a more measured and less divided political landscape.

### **2.6.3 Robustness**

To evaluate the robustness of our analysis, we additionally report results from generalized estimating equations (GEE) models with an autoregressive (AR1) specification (GEEAR1), and semi-robust standard errors. GEE models with an AR1 error specification are particularly suitable for our dataset as they account for the possibility of temporally correlated errors within countries (Fitzmaurice et al., 2004). This modelling approach is apt for datasets where errors are expected to be temporally correlated and where there are more units than time periods. We opted for an autoregressive correlation structure, AR(1), because our dependent variable is anticipated to exhibit positive correlation over time.

**Table 2.1** shows the coefficients for various covariates influencing EAP in Latin America using a GEE estimator. These results largely corroborate our prior findings, especially regarding our measures of EIP and our indicators of democratic quality. The consistent results across these measures underscore a strong relationship where ideological polarization acts as a driver of affective polarization, while democratic quality serves as a mitigating factor against partisan hostility among elites.

A notable observation is the variable representing the effective number of parliamentary parties. While it consistently shows a negative direction in its relationship with EAP, its statistical significance is limited to Model 1 ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests a weak and inconsistent linkage with EAP across the models, implying that factors such as proportionality or the size of the party system may not play a substantial role in shaping elite hostility.

Contrastingly, electoral volatility demonstrates a consistent negative effect across all models,



as highlighted by the triple asterisks denoting a high level of statistical significance. This finding indicates that increases in electoral volatility are associated with reductions in EAP, a significant insight that emphasizes the impact of electoral dynamics on elite political behaviour.

**Table 1: Covariates of Elite Affective Polarisation in Latin America, GEE(AR1) estimator**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Weighted EAP		
	Model 1 (1)	Model 2 (2)	Model 3 (3)
EIP (Classifier accuracy)	0.201* (0.113)	0.179** (0.080)	0.192** (0.097)
Electoral Volatility (Log)	-0.048*** (0.018)	-0.126*** (0.021)	-0.108*** (0.018)
Effective Number of Parties	-0.022 (0.014)	-0.004 (0.013)	-0.008 (0.012)
District Magnitude (Log)	-0.125** (0.049)	-0.072 (0.045)	-0.094** (0.046)
Additive polyarchy index		-0.519*** (0.159)	
Liberal democracy index			-0.296*** (0.108)
Constant	0.645*** (0.136)	1.117*** (0.189)	0.907*** (0.162)
Observations	941	940	940
Country-period	23	23	23

*Note: Robust standard errors are given in parentheses*

\* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01

#### 2.6.4 Validation

A crucial component of the computational measurement of elite political polarisation in Latin America is the validation of the text-based classification and sentiment scores. We use a multi-method approach which includes face validity and convergent validity assessments to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the polarisation measurements Goet (2019).

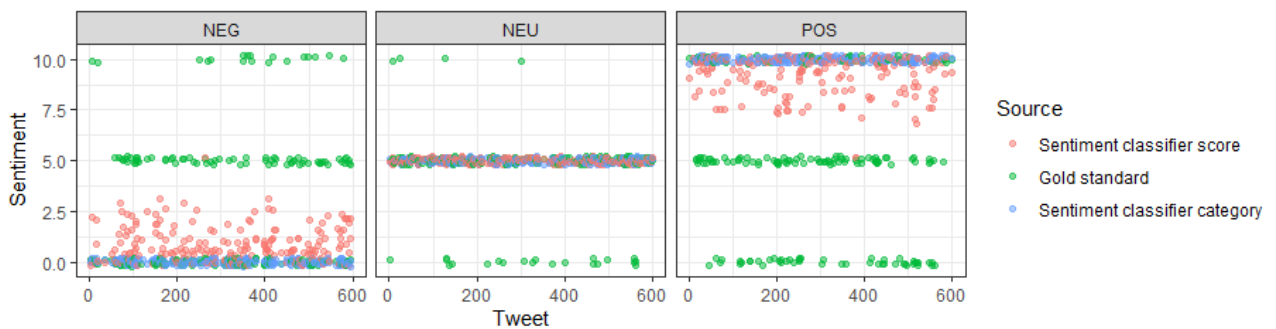
**Face validity** refers to the subjective evaluation of whether the measurements and estimates of elite political polarisation align with a priori expectations and theoretical understanding. Face validity is assessed at two levels. Firstly, the stability of Ideological Polarisation Estimates (IPE) was examined within each country, evaluating the reasonable level of stability between terms. This analysis helps to determine the extent in which the measurements capture meaningful and consistent patterns of polarisation within specific political contexts. Context-specific knowledge on the detailed political events and electoral dynamics in each country provides benchmarks which are useful to evaluate changes in polarization dynamics. Secondly, the elite polarisation estimates were compared to a priori expectations based on the existing literature and theoretical frameworks. This evaluation provides insights into the correspondence between the estimated levels of polarisation and the anticipated patterns of ideological divergence and partisan animosity among political elites.

- a. **Convergent validity** refers to the extent to which different measures of the same construct produce similar results. To assess the convergent validity of the polarisation measurements, two type of test were made. Firstly, the elite polarisation estimates were compared to widely accepted data based on elite surveys, such as the Dalton Elite Polarisation Index based on the Party Elites in Latin America (PELA). This evaluates the correspondence between the polarisation estimates derived from the proposed methodology and an established index of elite polarisation, providing additional validation for the measurements. Secondly, supervision of the computational estimates included human and synthetic supervision. We developed a three-step coding process that aimed at: (1) Testing the complexity of interpreting targeted affect in tweets mentioning users (yes/no), (2) Assessing the sentiment score (11-point scale (0 Very Negative – 5 Neutral – 10 Very Positive), and (3) Evaluating the level of politeness on a 3-point scale (Rude – Neither rude nor polite – Polite). Each coder, and ChatGPT received three sets of 100 tweets per country which were randomly selected from the tweets with mentions using quotas for sentiment stance,

incumbency status, and legislature. The countries in the supervision sample include Colombia, Chile, and Venezuela as we had access to native knowledge on these countries. A gold-standard was developed by the authors for Venezuela.

The results, as depicted in **Figure 2.5**, revealed that while the classifier exhibited some errors in identifying the sentiments of tweets, our methodological approach effectively addressed these inaccuracies. The triangulation method, combining the sentiment classifier score with the gold standard and category, allowed for a more accurate interpretation and classification of affective content in tweets. This approach not only enhanced the reliability of our sentiment analysis but also provided a robust framework for understanding affective polarisation in a nuanced and contextually relevant manner.

**Figure 2.5 Supervision results**



## 2.7 Conclusions

This study presents a novel exploration into elite affective polarization (EAP) within Latin American political systems, introducing a novel measure that emphasizes language as the primary conduit for expressing affective polarization among political elites. Employing state-of-the-art computational linguistics, we have developed a dataset that facilitates a quantitative comparison of both ideological and affective polarization within parliamentary elites across various Latin American countries. This methodological innovation addresses the limitations of traditional thermometer scales and survey items, offering a more nuanced lens through which to examine elite affective polarization.

Our research is distinguished not only by its methodological approach but also by its empirical scope. We have conducted a comprehensive cross-country analysis, uncovering patterns and dynamics of affective polarization among elites. This exploration offers critical insights into

the variations of polarization across the region, enriching the empirical landscape with detailed evidence of polarization's scope and intensity. These insights complement traditional measures derived from expert assessments, population surveys, and policy position analyses.

In our study, we analysed Twitter interactions of parliamentary representatives, focusing on the sentiment expressed towards ingroup and outgroup members. The findings highlight two primary trends. Firstly, tweets directed towards ingroup members predominantly convey positive sentiments, reflecting a strong sense of party loyalty and unity. This trend underlines the role of social media in bolstering party cohesion and publicly affirming allegiance to party ideologies and goals. Conversely, tweets about outgroup members are mostly negative, echoing the adversarial nature of political discourse, where social media serves as a battleground for challenging and critiquing rival parties.

However, our analysis also unveiled an unexpected dimension of parliamentary discourse on social media. Representatives frequently use Twitter to express not just negative sentiments towards adversaries but also positive messages, including those directed at opposing party members. Our qualitative examination of tweet samples revealed instances of tweets that not only affirm party loyalty but also demonstrate openness to cross-party cooperation. These interactions suggest a nuanced landscape of parliamentary discourse on social media, where alongside competition and criticism, there is a space for collaboration and acknowledgment of shared objectives across party lines.

Our initial expectations were that representatives acted more hostile toward other MPs because they have incentives for differentiating themselves from their peers within the party system. These incentives are influenced by a constellation of factors, including heightened elite ideological polarization, electoral volatility, the size of the party system, and the proportionality of the electoral system. However, contrary to our initial hypotheses, we discovered that electoral volatility and the characteristics of the electoral system consistently exhibit a negative effect on EAP across all models. This suggests that increased electoral competition and the size of the party may dilute affective polarization among elites, challenging pre-existing theories on the impact of electoral dynamics on elite behaviour.

Nevertheless, our research does confirm a positive relationship between high levels of elite ideological polarization and EAP, reinforcing the significance of ideological divides in fostering emotional antagonism among political elites. Furthermore, our study underscores the

mitigating influence of democratic quality on EAP. The findings consistently demonstrate that higher levels of democratic quality are associated with lower levels of affective polarization, indicating that more democratic and liberal systems may cultivate a less polarized elite environment. This highlights the stabilizing role of democratic institutions and practices in moderating elite polarization.

In validating our findings, we employed a multi-faceted approach. Alongside face validity, which involved a qualitative analysis within each country, and convergent validity, where we compared our measurements to established indices, we also introduced a rigorous human evaluation process. This process included asking country coders to discern if the language used by political elites was charged with positive or negative sentiment and to what intensity, on a scale from 0 to 10. Furthermore, we assessed the level of politeness in discourse, categorizing interactions as no insult, soft insult, or grave insult. This human supervision added a qualitative dimension to our quantitative methods, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the nuances in political communication.

Despite these strengths, our study acknowledges several limitations that open avenues for future research. A more comprehensive validation process, considering additional datasets or methodologies, could further reinforce the robustness of our findings. The historical differences between countries in Latin America, often marked by unique political and social dynamics, warrant closer examination in future studies. The role of populism, a prominent feature in the region's political landscape, also needs to be explored in relation to elite affective polarization.

Additionally, understanding the impact of the age of democratic traditions (young vs. old) on EAP would provide deeper insights into how longstanding democratic practices shape political elite behaviours. The influence of social contexts and focusing events, such as economic crises or social movements, could significantly impact elite polarization. The phenomenon of lawfare and its role in shaping elite dynamics and polarization presents an intriguing area for exploration. Lastly, the effects of political and social turmoil, including protests and government instability, on elite affective polarization should be examined in future studies.

Lastly, this study contributes significantly to the understanding of elite affective polarization in Latin American political contexts. By introducing novel methodological approaches and providing empirical evidence across multiple countries, our research challenges existing paradigms and enriches the discourse on political behaviour among elites. These findings not

only advance academic scholarship but also offer practical insights for the management of political systems and the fostering of democratic stability. As political landscapes continue to evolve, the insights from this study will be instrumental in guiding both scholarly inquiry and practical governance strategies.

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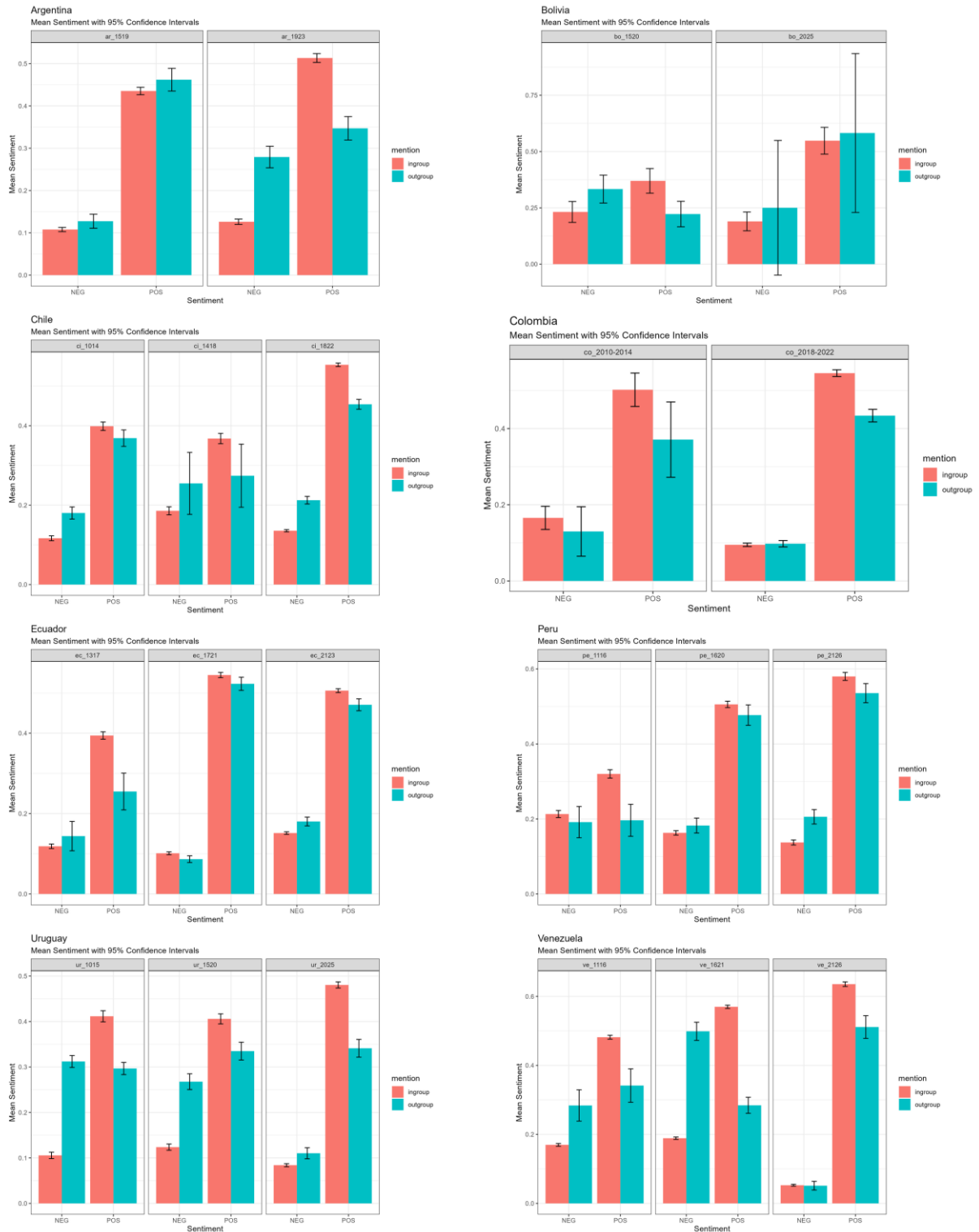


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# Appendix A

Figure A1 Mean levels of sentiment by country/legislative.



## 2.8 Text preprocessing

Before the analysis, the retrieved Tweet data undergoes a cleaning process. This involves

standardizing the text case, eliminating *stopwords* (articles, pronouns, etc.), extracting the text content by removing images and hyperlinks embedded in the tweets, and excluding special characters such as @, #, etc. Additionally, the process we eliminate single characters and white spaces to ensure the data is refined and conducive to effective analysis.

<b>Table A1 Supervision results for Venezuela</b>			
<b>Venezuela</b>			
<b>Question</b>	<b>N° of tweets</b>	<b>Raters</b>	<b>Krippendorff's alpha</b>
<b>Sentiment (binary)</b>	200	2 native coders	0.126
<b>Sentiment score (0-10)</b>	200	2 native coders	0.48
<b>Insult (Rude - non - Polite)</b>	200	2 native coders	0.465
<b>Sentiment score (POS-NEU-NEG)</b>	600	Gold-standard & Targeted sentiment classifier	0.341
<b>Sentiment score (0-10)</b>	200	2 native coders & Targeted sentiment classifier	0.294
<b>Sentiment (binary)</b>	292	ChatGPT3 & ChatGPT4	0.313
<b>Sentiment score (0-10)</b>	259	ChatGPT3 & ChatGPT4	0.561
<b>Insult (Rude - non - Polite)</b>	300	ChatGPT3 & ChatGPT4	
<b>Sentiment score (0-10)</b>	172	2 native coders & Targeted sentiment classifier & ChatGPT3 & ChatGPT4	0.407

**Table A2 OLS regression models including EIP (Chapel Hill)**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Weighted EAP			
	Model 1 (1)	Model 2 (2)	Model 3 (3)	Model 4 (4)
EIP (Chapel Hill)	0.007 (0.005)			
EIP (Classifier accuracy)		0.201*** (0.026)	0.179*** (0.024)	0.192*** (0.025)

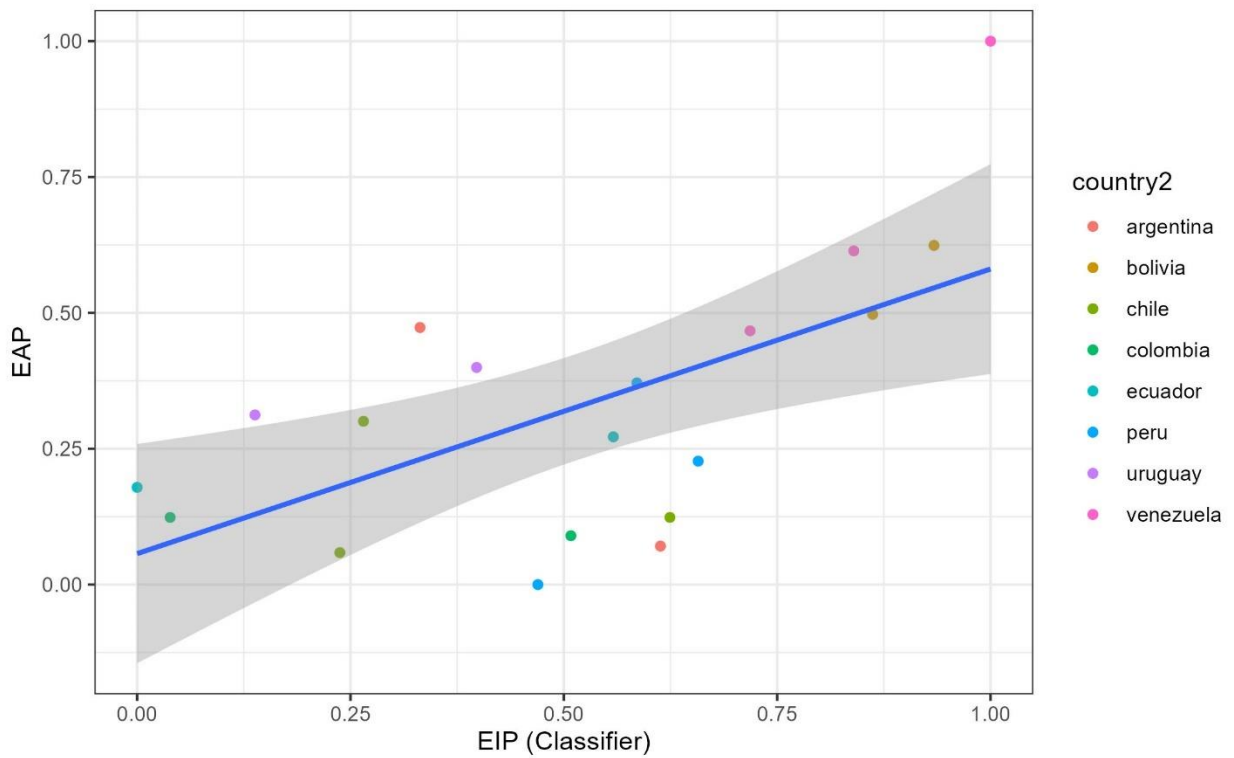
Electoral Volatility (Log)	-0.094*** (0.009)	-0.048*** (0.009)	-0.126*** (0.010)	-0.108*** (0.010)
Effective Number of Parties	-0.015*** (0.003)	-0.022*** (0.004)	-0.004 (0.004)	-0.008* (0.005)
District Magnitude (Log)	-0.071*** (0.012)	-0.125*** (0.011)	-0.072*** (0.011)	-0.094*** (0.011)
Additive polyarchy index	-0.253*** (0.049)		-0.519*** (0.040)	
Liberal democracy index				-0.296*** (0.033)
Constant	0.880*** (0.054)	0.645*** (0.043)	1.117*** (0.054)	0.907*** (0.050)
Observations	822	941	940	940
R <sup>2</sup>	0.224	0.401	0.495	0.452
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.219	0.398	0.492	0.449
Residual Std. Error	0.131 (df = 816)	0.161 (df = 936)	0.148 (df = 934)	0.154 (df = 934)
F Statistic	47.025*** (df = 5; 816)	156.431*** (df = 4; 936)	183.234*** (df = 5; 934)	154.316*** (df = 5; 934)

*Note:*

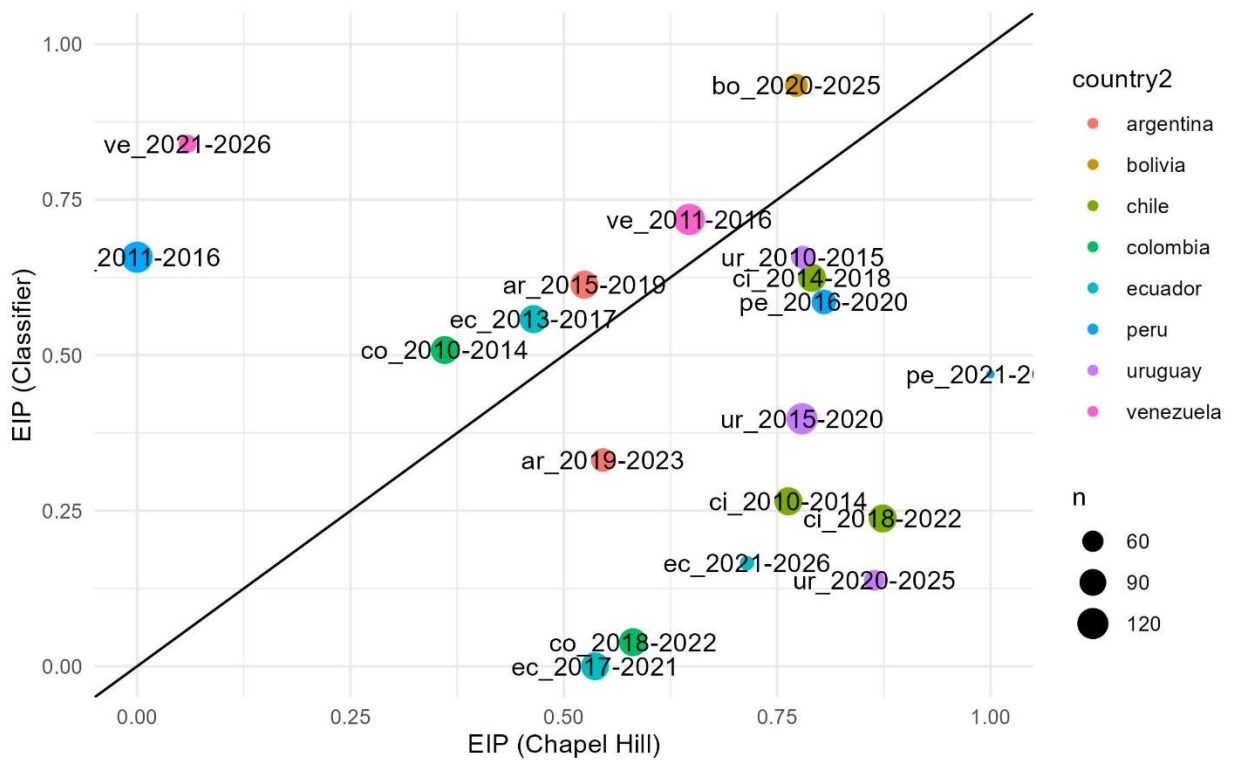
\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

As an alternative measure of EIP we rely on data of the 2020 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Latin America (Martínez-Gallardo et al., 2023) to know the ideological positions of party elites. Next, we apply Dalton's formula (2008) to compute a polarisation index based on each party's overall ideology over a legislative term. This involves subtracting the mean ideology of all parties, weighted by the party's vote share, from the ideology of each individual party. The resulting differences are squared and further weighted by the party's vote share in the election. We run the same models but using this measure at the yearly level. The results can be found in appendix table A2. The influence of this index on EAP is minimal and is not statistically significant. While this suggests that EIP does not have a substantial impact on EAP, we must consider that this can be an effect of missing data in the Chapel Hill dataset for 4 on the countries/legislative terms in our sample.

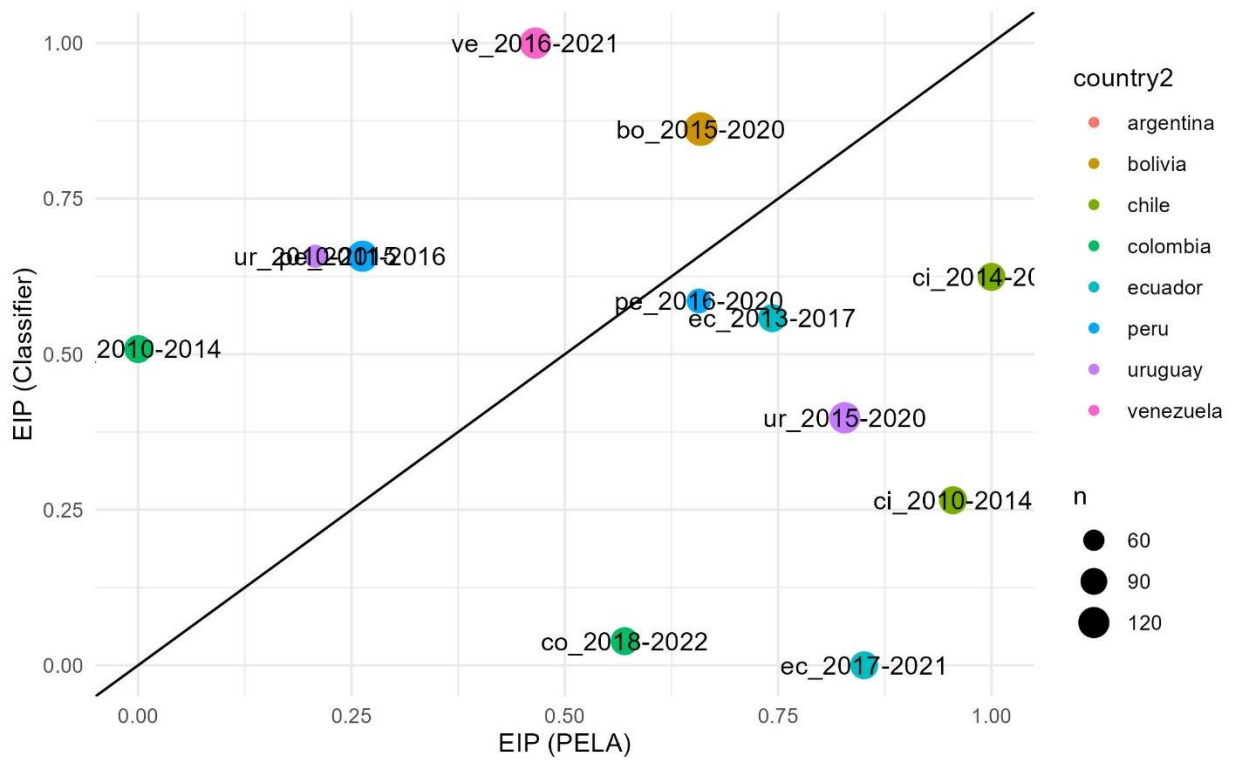
**Figure A2 Bivariate correlation between EAP and EIP (Classifier)**



**Figure A3 Bivariate correlation between EIP (Classifier) and EIP (Chapel Hill)**



**Figure A4 Bivariate correlation between EIP (Classifier) and EIP (PELA)**



### **3 Chapter 2: Expanding the link: institutional and individual determinants of affective polarisation.**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Polarisation has been extensively examined in the political science (Sani & Sartori, 1983; Taylor & Herman, 1971) and has gained increasing prominence in public discourse in recent years. However, the nature of polarisation has evolved beyond traditional parties and candidate divisions to a conflict primarily rooted in core identities. This phenomenon, known as "affective polarisation" (Iyengar et al., 2019), refers to the intense aversion individuals feel towards opposing parties while strengthening their positive feelings toward their party. A growing body of literature has explored numerous factors contributing to strengthening in-group attachments and developing negative intergroup sentiments (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Rudolph & Hetherington, 2021; Torcal & Carty, 2022). Nonetheless, limited research exists on the influence of institutional and contextual factors on affective polarisation. This knowledge gap likely arises from the relatively constant systemic factors present in the regions that previous studies have focused on, namely, the United States and Europe. Consequently, it remains unclear which of these factors are correlated with affective polarisation. Moreover, the concentration of empirical studies in these regions may have overshadowed the potential voter-related factors that contribute to affective polarisation.

This paper is deeply inspired by the seminal work of Gidron et al. (Gidron et al., 2020), Curini and Hino (2012) and Reiljan et al. (2023) as it aims to enhance our understanding of affective polarisation by introducing previously overlooked variables into the existing literature. First, comparative studies have predominantly focused on parliamentary systems and paid limited attention to the impact of presidential systems. Hence, this study explores the variations between these types of regimes and seeks to test with empirical evidence whether classical theoretical contributions made by authors such as Juan Linz on the relationship of regime types and polarisation also apply in the case of affective polarisation. Second, I propose that high levels of perceived widespread corruption undermine the principle of equity, a fundamental element of a democratic system. Consequently, such perceptions may foster societal divisions in which individuals believe that the opposing party benefits disproportionately.

Also in this paper, I reexamine the well-known relationship between partisanship and affective



polarisation and explore how it differs across political systems characterized by high electoral volatility and party system instability. Finally, I continue with recent efforts to bring together the literature of affective polarisation and the personalisation of politics, which, in the face of the significant dealignment of voters with political parties, recognises the growing importance of party leaders as central figures in political competition (Ferreira da Silva et al., 2021).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, a brief explanation of the theoretical underpinnings of affective polarisation is provided. Second, we introduce explanatory variables and outline our expectations, in conjunction with the hypotheses explored in extant studies. I use multiple data sources, including the CSES (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) surveys, up to the recent CSES Module 5. Finally, I discuss the findings, where I show the importance of leadership identification for both party affective polarisation (PAP) and leader affective polarisation (LAP), especially in presidential regimes. This study also reveals how partisanship matters more in parliamentary regimes compared to presidential regimes. Finally, it discovers a positive correlation between perception of widespread corruption on both measures of affective polarisation.

### **3.2 Theoretical framework**

When we speak of political polarisation, we usually refer to the distance or proximity perceived by political elites, in terms of how close or distant they feel from other parties (Sani & Sartori, 1983), to the extent that the higher the ideological or programmatic discrepancies, the higher the polarisation (Casal Bértoa & Rama, 2021). Just as parties differentiate among themselves along these dimensions, so do the voters align ideologically with each party (Layman et al., 2006). These distances between groups can end up being positive for the political system, as they articulate competition between parties, allow the electorate to easily discern between different options, and choose the option that best suits their preferences when voting (Barber & McCarty, 2015).

Affective polarisation, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which citizens feel more negativity towards other parties than towards their own (Iyengar et al., 2019). A substantive part of the affective polarisation literature is built over the social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979). This hypothesis assumes that partisanship can become a social identity (Ward & Tavits, 2019a), leading to a dual process where feelings of outgroup aversion are created, and simultaneously ingroup favouritism emerge. As early studies on affective polarisation focused

on the United States, a country with a high level of partisanship, partisan identification played a major role in explaining this phenomenon. Party identification works as an informational shortcuts to the voter that help him to identify outside groups as competitors (Medeiros & Noël, 2014).

What drives affective polarisation is yet to be fully grasped, but several studies have stressed positive correlations with a wide set of factors. Some studies have focused on social dynamics such as group formation and have found a higher levels of affective polarisation with the growth of in-group homogeneity or social sorting (Harteveld, 2021; Mason, 2016), the access of populist parties to the party system (Harteveld et al., 2021); the increase of partisan bias of the media (Levendusky, 2013); and the rise of post-materialist values on the public agenda and its "threat" to established cultural identities (Fukuyama, 2018; Huddy et al., 2015). Others have focused on voter-related factors and have shown a positive correlation with partisan identification (Wagner, 2020), as well as with the perception of ideological polarisation, which is the difference between the position of individuals vis-à-vis a central position (Ward & Tavits, 2019b).

Amidst the growing literature on affective polarisation in recent years, its multidimensional nature, as described by Reiljan et al. (2023), has become increasingly apparent. Furthermore, it operates as a multilevel phenomenon, influenced by both institutional and individual factors. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish affective polarisation based on the specific political objects toward which these attitudes are directed.

Many scholars have noted the extreme increase in partisan conflict, especially in countries where partisans are well-socially sorted (Mason, 2015, 2016). That is, an alignment of political identities with other identities (Harteveld, 2021). This process is making parties more internally homogeneous while at the same time becoming more different from each other (Brewer, 2005). From a social identity perspective, categorizing political opponents and rival parties as an external group may be sufficient to trigger discriminatory dynamics (Martherus et al., 2021). Therefore, there is a latent risk of radicalizing society to the point where another adversarial group is considered an enemy. Heightened levels of affective polarisation could create a "them" vs. "us" situation, which can end up generating discriminatory or even violent behaviour towards militants outside the in-group (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022).

Extreme levels of affective polarisation could have damaging consequences for democracy. It

not only hampers inter-group interaction as it reduces interpersonal trust (McCoy & Somer, 2019), but also undermines trust in the institutions of political representation (Hetherington, 2015; Kalmoe & Mason, 2019), and affects system effectiveness, as it increases the bias towards critical evaluation of the government's performance (Iyengar et al., 2019). Nevertheless, recent finding has shown that certain levels of affective polarisation can encourage mobilization as increases the stakes for electoral competition (Harteveld & Wagner, 2022).

Other lines of research on this phenomenon have focused on the like and dislike of party leaders, as they represent a different political object. Despite the relevant role of leaders in contemporary democracies, little is known about the polarisation of people's feelings toward party leaders, especially outside the United States. Recent studies in the European context have shown that in-party liking is superior to in-leader liking, and out-party dislike is greater than out-leader dislike (Comellas Bonsfills, 2022). Nevertheless, the role of leadership in the parliamentary context is not as clear as that in presidential systems.

As mentioned before, even though we know the important effect that institutions have on our political attitudes, there is a significant lack of studies on the impact of institutional factors on affective polarisation. A key factor revolves around the importance of the role of the chief executive, which is largely determined by the country's political system.

### **3.3 Explanatory variables**

#### ***3.3.1 Parliamentarism and Presidentialism***

There seems to be a consensus that there are two “pure” types of regimes, parliamentary and presidential, as well as one that combines features of both variously called a mixed, semi-presidential, or parliamentary presidential system (Cheibub, 2007). The basic distinction to which I will refer is naturally based on ideal types, although in political reality, it is far from being neat. While in **parliamentary** systems the government is elected by the legislature and in **presidential** systems by popular vote, the core distinction is whether the executive can be removed a by a vote of the legislature. Therefore, systems in which the government cannot be removed by the legislature are presidential; those in which it can be are parliamentary (Przeworski, 2018).

The parliamentary election might produce an absolute majority for a particular party, but normally it gives representation to several parties, perhaps one with a larger plurality than others, among which some negotiations and sharing of power are times necessary to obtain majority support for a prime minister or the tolerance of a minority government (Cheibub, 2007; Falcó-Gimeno, 2014). This means that the incumbent will be aware of the demands of separate groups, moreover, concerned about retaining their support, and correspondingly, different parties will not lose expectations of exercising a share in power, an ability to control, and the opportunity to gain benefits for their supporters.

Presidentialism has more dire implications when defining the winners from the losers. The most important implication of presidentialism is that it introduces an element of a zero-sum game into democratic politics with rules that tend towards a "winner takes all" outcome (Linz, 1990). The zero-sum game in presidential regimes raises the stakes in a presidential election for winners and losers, inevitably increasing polarisation (Linz, 1985). This is because winners and losers are defined for the period of the presidential mandate, during which there is no hope for any shifts in alliances or casting out the executive apart from extraordinary circumstances like the impeachment process or other crisis situations that might lead to the dissolution of the government and new elections. The winners will hold office, and the losers will have to wait four or five years without any access to executive power, nor to a share in the formation of cabinets or access to patronage.

This distinction sheds light on the challenges faced by parliamentary systems, which heavily rely on consensus for their proper functioning. In situations where consensus is lacking, these systems may encounter significant obstacles and may even collapse. Conversely, presidential systems are generally more stable (Przeworski, 2018) and adept at navigating polarized scenarios, what could lead to exhibiting a lesser concern for affective polarisation.

The seminal work of Gidron et al. (2020), Reiljan et al. (2023) have been among the few that have previously addressed this relationship between institutions and affective polarisation. Gidron et al. (2020) focus around electoral systems and electoral rules. Their analysis distinguishes between majoritarian institutions versus consensual institutions only focusing on the proportionality of the electoral system as they operationalized this distinction by using the average district magnitude as explanatory variable. However, the limitation of this approach is that it fails to account for other important factors like executive-party dimensions or executive dominance. Reiljan et al. (2023) take a more "Linian" approach, like the one adopted by this

paper, and find that presidential systems display systematically lower levels of affective polarisation compared to parliamentary systems. Their results also show that, in presidential systems, LAP is higher than PAP revealing the polarizing nature of presidential candidates. Their work also makes a relevant contribution to the important role of government effectiveness and overall regime performance in decreasing affective polarisation. Adding to this contribution, in the next section I introduce corruption as a variable that, while related to government performance, is closer to how individuals perceive government action.

It is crucial to recognize that majoritarian democracies tend to be polarizing, while consensus democracy is not. Consequently, the institutional components of majority democracy, such as the presidential system of government, inherently contribute to polarisation (Aguilera de Prat & Martínez, 2000). The factors leading to affective polarisation may have other explanations, but it is undoubtedly easier to witness the emergence of affective polarisation when political polarisation stemming from the majority exists, as opposed to the consensus-driven nature of parliamentary systems. I put this claim to a test, and we expect that:

*H1.1: PAP will be higher in parliamentary regimes, but lower in presidential regimes.*

*H1.2: LAP will be higher in presidential regimes, but lower in parliamentary regimes.*

Appendix 1 shows the political system for every country in the sample. It is important to note that the composition of the country samples for presidential regimes are derived from Latin American nations, apart from one, the United States. This was not a deliberate choice but rather a result of practical constraints in the data available for this study. Nonetheless, this composition provides an opportunity to examine the phenomenon of affective polarisation in regions with varying degrees of democratic consolidation and diverse political landscapes, including those facing specific challenges such as party system institutionalization and electoral volatility.

### **3.3.2 Corruption**

The second theoretical proposition of this study revolves around a contextual factor closely related to the performance of institutions: corruption. Previous research has found the importance of institutional performance as a driver of affective polarisation. Gidron et al. (2020) cross-country analysis show that better economic performance is related to lower levels of PAP, a trend supported by the findings of Reiljan et al. (2023) on effective government

performance. However, existing research has shown that corruption can lead to negative perceptions institutional performance (Chang & Chu, 2006; De Vaal & Ebben, 2011). This raises an important consideration: if the public perceives that institutions are failing to meet their demands, favouring certain groups over others, then it stands to reason that an increased perception of corruption might significantly contribute to higher levels of affective polarisation.

This theoretical claim is consistent with previous research that claims that corruption poses a formidable challenge to democratic institutions as it undermines one of their fundamental principles: equality (De Vries & Solaz, 2017; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). By perpetuating the belief that access to public services and policies hinges on bribery or influence peddling, corruption distorts the notion of equal treatment, limiting their availability to privileged groups rather than serving the collective interests and demands of the populace (Chang & Chu, 2006). This erosion of equality erodes public trust in institutions and compromises the legitimacy of the democratic system (Carreras & Irepoğlu, 2013). Perception of corruption is crucial explaining the levels of political trust (Della Porta, 2000). Consequently, corruption not only impedes the functioning of democratic institutions but also violates the core principles of equality and legitimacy in democracy.

Addressing corruption presents a complex endeavour, as the process of identifying, gathering, and attributing responsibility for corrupt practices involves navigating through intricate webs of information (Healy & Malhotra, 2013). Additionally, there are partisan biases that prevent politicians from being punished, despite poor performance or corruption (Anduiza et al., 2013; Blais et al., 2017). The resulting disenchantment with political parties has led to substantial transformations in party systems and created an environment conducive to the rise of anti-system parties (Lupu, 2011).

It is particularly concerning the prevalence of corruption in presidential regimes compared to parliamentary ones, attributed to the lower institutional quality commonly associated with presidential systems (Golden & Mahdavi, 2015). The inherent vulnerabilities and weak checks and balances in presidential systems create fertile ground for corrupt practices and provide heightened incentives for rent-seeking behaviour (Lederman et al., 2005).

Corruption not only disrupts the functioning of democratic institutions but also subverts the foundational principles of equality and democracy. Its distortion of equal treatment fosters an

atmosphere of distrust toward institutions and undermines the legitimacy of the democratic system. Consequently, I argue that corruption not only erodes the essence of democracy but also fuels the potential for affective polarisation within society. Moreover, corruption's ramifications extend beyond institutional decay, as it engenders an environment ripe for affective polarisation. When corruption compromises the principles of equality and democratic representation, it perpetuates the perception that institutions prioritize the interests of select groups over the collective welfare, intensifying negative sentiments and aversion towards opposing political parties, thereby deepening societal divisions. Therefore:

*H2: A higher perception of widespread corruption will have a positive effect on affective polarisation, but stronger in presidential regimes.*

### **3.3.3 Partisanship**

Previous study has already shown that affective polarisation and partisanship are correlated (Mason, 2015; Wagner, 2020), but the effects can vary in countries with high levels of electoral volatility and party system instability. Albeit party identification was initially considered as an “*unmoved mover*” (Garzia, 2013), a pre-political attitude immune to any political and economic short-term influences, the erosion of cleavage-based voting emptied much of Western political parties’ loyal support base (Ferreira da Silva et al., 2021). However, this process has not been homogeneous, and some countries have suffered a more drastic decline in party identification than others.

While partisanship is well established in the United States and other advanced democracies, and in some cases, may become intergenerational, adherence to political parties is generally weaker in developing countries (Ames et al., 2012). Unlike in the United States and more established democracies, where party identification can be deeply ingrained and even passed down through generations, less developed countries (i.e., Latin American countries) exhibit lower levels of alignment with political parties (Carreras et al., 2015).

When examining the relationship between partisanship and presidential systems, it is crucial to consider the unique context of Latin America. The region's high levels of electoral volatility, party system instability, and lower levels of party identification shape the dynamics of partisanship in these countries, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of political behaviour in Latin American presidential systems.

Although the levels of party alignment are low in Latin America, they are not absent. There are still individuals who align themselves with specific political parties and exhibit some degree of partisan attachment. One of the reasons for this lower level of party identification in Latin America is the frequent political and socioeconomic changes experienced by the region. These changes often lead to new patterns of relationships between parties and citizens (Carreras, 2012). Continuous shifts in political alliances, economic conditions, and social dynamics can disrupt traditional party loyalties and make party identification less stable and enduring.

Moreover, Latin America has a history of political fragmentation and multiple party systems, which further contributes to party system instability. The presence of numerous parties and frequent electoral volatility can make it challenging for individuals to establish strong and lasting partisan attachments. In such contexts, voters may be more likely to base their choices on short-term considerations, such as candidate appeal or policy proposals, rather than long-standing party affiliations.

Latin American countries, although characterized by lower levels of party identification compared to developed countries, still exhibit varying degrees of partisanship. It is plausible to consider that the growth in mean levels of partisanship in Latin America in the 2010s could be attributed, at least in part, to the rise of left populist governments in the region during that period.

The rise of these left populist leaders likely resulted in increased levels of political mobilization and polarisation (as suggested by Singer, 2016). Supporters of these governments, who identified strongly with their ideological orientation and policy agenda, may have experienced a heightened sense of partisanship. At the same time, opposition groups and individuals who disagreed with the policies and ideology of these left populist governments might have also become more politically active and partisan in their opposition.

The decline in mean levels of partisanship in Latin America in the early 2020s could indeed be related to the end of the left populist cycle in some countries. As some left-wing governments lost power or faced significant challenges, the political landscape shifted, potentially leading to changes in party identification and decreased levels of partisanship.

Prior research (Wagner, 2020) has shown that affective polarisation has a clear positive effect on partisanship. Although we should also expect to find a positive effect and confirm past



findings, I argue that:

*H3.1: The effect of partisanship will be positive for both measures of affective polarisation, but stronger for PAP.*

*H3.2: Partisanship will have a lower effect in presidential regimes.*

### **3.3.4 Leadership identification**

While attitudes toward political parties can be influenced by various factors such as issue preferences (Downs, 1957), valence issues (Stokes, 1963), and retrospective evaluations of party performance (Fiorina, 2002), it is important to recognize that voters' assessments of elements associated with these parties, particularly their leaders, also play a significant role in modelling these attitudes (Garzia, 2013). Even more, over the last two decades, party leaders have become very important figures shaping political behaviour (Ferreira da Silva et al., 2021). This has not come as a great surprise as the decline in party identification in western democracies has resulted in an electorate less reliant to partisan cues (Garzia & Ferreira da Silva, 2021) and more responsive to short-term factors like evaluations of party leaders (Garzia, 2011).

Leadership is indeed a structural feature of ingroups, as leaders and followers are interdependent roles embedded within a social system bounded by common group or category membership (Hogg, 2001). This connection between leaders and party affiliation has become increasingly significant in modern politics due to the *personalization of politics* in Western democracies (Garzia et al., 2022). As a result, political leaders have gained a central role in voters' political reasoning, as they are easier to evaluate compared to complex political ideologies and issues (Pierce, 1993). This shift is evident in various trends, such as the substitution of party symbols for leader images in election campaigns, increased media focus on candidates over their parties, and the routine labelling of executives after their leaders' names (Garzia, 2011; McAllister, 2007).

Group leaders have the potential to shape political identities through their verbal and nonverbal communication (Huddy & Yair, 2021). Their influential role extends to setting agendas, defining collective identities, and mobilizing people toward collective goals across various social contexts (Hogg, 2001). Thus, identification with a leader has not only an evaluative/affective component (like and dislike) but also a conative or intentional factor,

which determines whether individuals engage in one political behaviour (i.e., voting behaviour) or another.

Partisan loyalties have transformed, moving away from their historical reliance on long-term social and ideological factors, and are now more closely tied to individual attitudes toward prominent figures within political parties (Garzia, 2013). Consequently, if we conceptualize party identification as the act of an individual assimilating the identity of the political party, they hold the strongest affinity for, we can likewise conceptualize leader identification as the phenomenon where a voter constructs their political identity around the leader, they favour the most. Subsequently, leader identification could be seen not as a proxy of partisanship but as an independent variable of ingroup identification, one that is not bound by the restrictions of identifying with a particular party. Based on this assumptions I expect that:

*H4.1: Leader identification will have a positive effect on affective polarisation, but stronger on LAP.*

*H4.2: Leader identification will be higher in presidential systems.*

The hypotheses discussed in this section of the paper are summarised in **Table 3.1**. Classified according to their origins (political institutions, contextual, and electorate features), they show the expected direction that each measure of affective polarisation will take.

**Table 3.1 Determinants of affective polarisation: Hypotheses and explanatory variables**

<b>Hypotheses /Explanatory variables</b>	<b>Expected effect on:</b>	
	<b>PAP</b>	<b>LAP</b>
<i>Institutional hypotheses</i>		
H1.1: Parliamentary regime	Positive and higher than LAP	Weaker
H1: Presidential regime	Weaker	Positive and higher than PAP
<i>Contextual hypotheses</i>		
H2: Perception of widespread corruption	Positive	Positive
<i>Voter's hypotheses</i>		

H3.1: Party identification	Positive	Positive
H3.2: An interaction term between Party Identification and Presidential Regime	Positive (When Presidential Regime = 1)	Weaker or non-significant (When Presidential Regime = 1)
H4.1: Leader Identification	Positive	Positive
H4.2: An interaction term between Party Identification and Presidential Regime	Weaker or non-significant (When Presidential Regime = 1)	Positive (When Presidential Regime = 1)

### 3.4 Data and method

In this paper, I will examine how affective polarisation is associated with the institutional and individual-level factors: the type of regime (semi-/presidentialism vs. parliamentarism), perception of corruption, partisanship, and leader identification. To empirically identify these claims, I use data from modules 1 to 5 from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), which contains post-electoral surveys that include like-dislike scales for both leaders<sup>12</sup> and parties conducted on the seven Latin American countries that make up the survey (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay), 31 European democracies, the United States of America, and Canada. For achieving valid cross-national comparisons, I follow Reiljan's method (2020) and estimate the vote shares received by each party based on their results in the last parliamentary elections. In this way, at least theoretically, the affective polarisation measure can capture all preferences since more parties are running. Moreover, in presidential elections votes are assigned to candidates, not to parties (Reiljan et al., 2023). However, vote shares in presidential elections were considered when data for parliamentary elections was not available in the dataset.

To measure affective polarisation, in this paper, I use Wagner's (2020) mean weighted spread-of-scores measure of affective polarisation, which captures the extent to which affect is spread across the various voters' groups and leaders in each party system. The spread-of-scores index recognizes that individuals may not have a single positive party identification, and thus, it considers all respondents who express feelings of like-dislike towards voters and leaders.

This index is measured for the party's voters and leaders of different countries who declare a

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<sup>12</sup> Party leader like-dislike item is not present in the Wave 2 (covering the years from 2001-2006)

level of affect for at least two parties' voters or leaders. Using a like-dislike scale question included in the survey, I obtained the ratings of respondents from political parties in their country on a 0-10 scale where higher numbers denote more positive evaluations. The research design starts with the time series in the mid-1990s and extends it to the most recently available survey (2019). These scales are commonly used to measure affective polarisation in comparative studies (Gidron et al., 2019; Wagner, 2020). This measure is weighted by the relative sizes of the parties. That is, the percentage of votes obtained by each party in the last election.

As for the measures of the main explanatory variables, for categorizing the type of regime of every country in the sample I use Bormann and Golder's (2022) Democratic Electoral Systems (DES) dataset which provides information on electoral rules, party system and type of regime. The presidential regime is as a dummy variable that takes "1" if the country has a presidential system, and "0" if not. Thus, the reference category includes both parliamentary and semi-presidential regimes. For addressing any concern of Perception of corruption comes from the World Governance Indicators (WGI), whose series starts in 1996. The index ranges from -2.5 (high perception of corruption) to 2.5 (clean) as scores are standard deviations with respect to the world mean (Kaufmann et al., 2009).

Partisanship is measured as a dummy variable, taking "1" for the respondents who answered "yes" to the question "Do you feel closer to a one party?" and "0" otherwise. Leadership identification (LI) is established based on two primary criteria. The first criterion is rooted in the affective domain and focus on the individual's most liked leader. This emotional connection can be quantified as a numerical measure reflecting the individual's Likability Score (LS) towards the specific leader. However, to validate this identification, it necessitates a profound affinity for a political party's leader. True identification with a leader cannot be asserted if the most liked leader gets a Likability Score (LS) of 5 on a 10-point scale. If an individual  $i$  assigns a score greater than 7 to a leader  $j$  in the like-dislike scale, it indicates a strong liking. I assign a binary value to this criterion, where 1 represents a strong liking ( $Like_m > 7$ ), and 0 represents otherwise. The second criterion pertains to conative behaviour, specifically, the act of voting for the leader's political party in the preceding election. When an individual has cast their vote in favour of the leader's party during the previous election, the variable  $VB$  (Voting Behaviour) is assigned a value of 1; conversely, it is assigned a value of 0 if they did not vote for the leader's party.

This way we can define the leadership identification (LI) variable as a function of these two criteria:

$$LI_i(VB_i, LS_i) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } (P_i = P_j) \wedge (Like_j > 7) \\ 0 & \text{Otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Consequently,  $LI_i$  represents a binary dummy variable that assumes a value of “1” when two conditions are met for individual  $i$ : firstly, the individual's voting behavior ( $VB$ ) in the election aligns with their preference for the political party ( $P_i$ ) that corresponds to their most liked leader ( $P_j$ ), and secondly, the likability score associated with the most liked leader ( $Like_j$ ) surpasses the threshold of 7. Otherwise,  $LI_i$  assumes the value “0”.

Replicating Wagner (2020), I include ideological polarisation index developed by Dalton (2008) which measures the distance between each respondent's left-right placement and the average ideological position of the sample. The range of the index goes from 0 (no polarisation) to 10. I also control for a variable capturing each respondent's the highest like-dislike score, so that affective polarisation does not act as a proxy for simply liking a party. Furthermore, I control for standard socio-demographic variables (income as a continuous variable, and gender as a dummy variable).

Testing these hypotheses presents challenges due to the multi-level structure of our data and the complexity of our explanatory variables. To comprehensively examine variations in affective polarisation across different political regimes and delve into differences across individuals within these institutional contexts, the identification strategy in this paper comprises two sequential steps, both at the individual level.

In the first phase of analysis, I employ regression models with interaction terms at the individual level. This approach allows to investigate how the influence of party identification and leader identification on affective polarisation varies across different types of political regimes. Specifically, it explores the interplay between party identification, leader identification, and type of regime.

An interaction term between the type of regime and party identification, as well as another interaction term between the type of regime and leader identification, provide mechanisms for understanding whether the impact of party identification and leader identification on affective polarisation differs depending on whether a country operates under a presidential or

parliamentary system. By employing these interaction effects, we can uncover whether the relationships between party identification, leader identification, and affective polarisation are stronger, weaker, or distinct in presidential regimes compared to other types of political systems. This method provides insights on how political institutions, such as presidential systems, may moderate the links between party identification, leader identification, and affective polarisation among individuals.

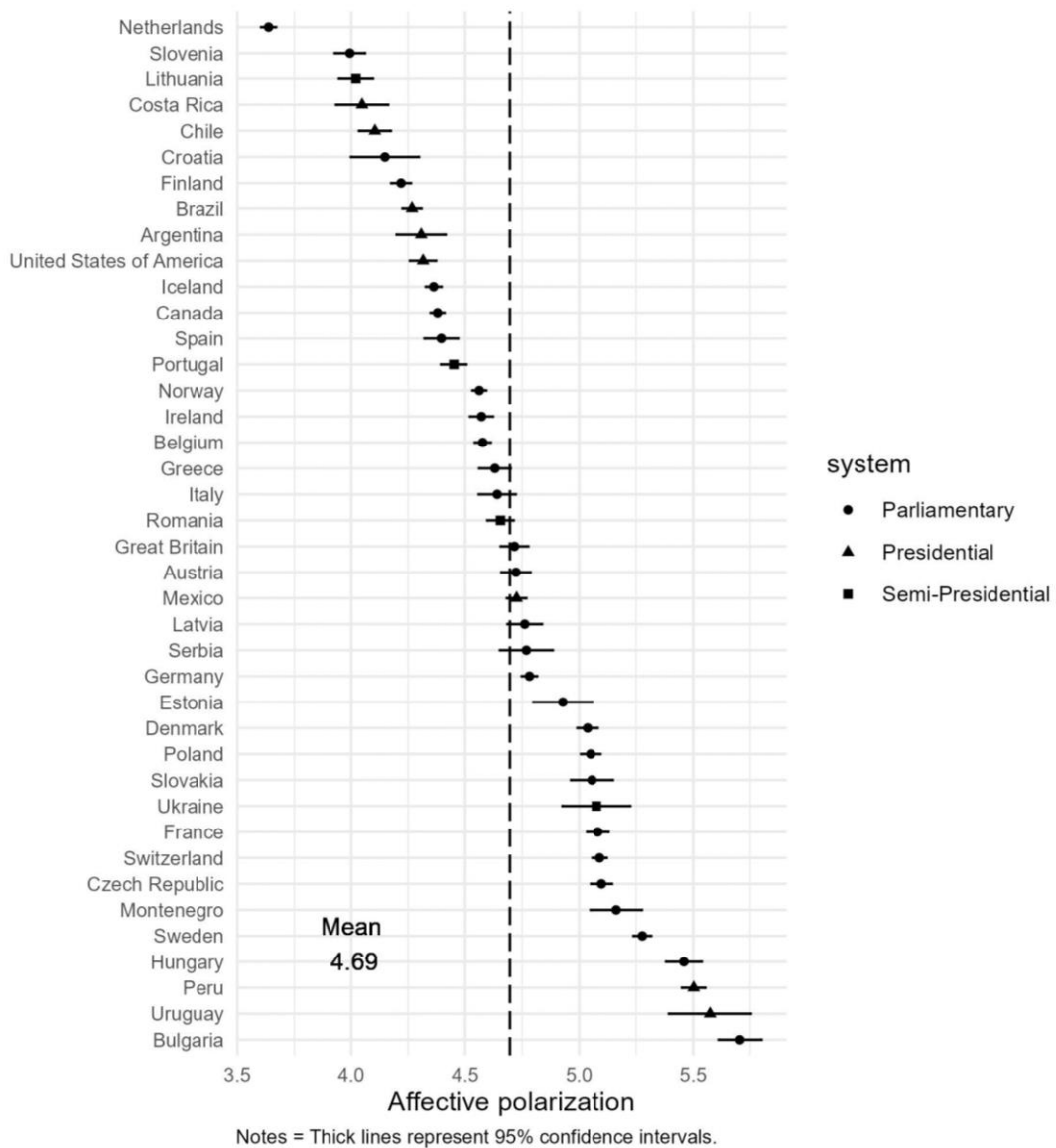
In the second phase of the analysis, I segment the sample by political system to focus on the nuances within each political system at the individual level. This method allows to account for individual heterogeneity and to isolate the individual-level impact of electorate-level and contextual variables within each political system. This sequential approach not only replicates the findings at the individual level but also allows to uncover novel insights into the dynamics of affective polarisation within specific institutional frameworks.

### **3.5 Results and discussion**

**Figure 3.1** shows the average PAP scores, based on like-dislike scores for parties, for each country with 95% confidence intervals. The figure shows important heterogeneity across countries. It is apparent from this figure that, in general, parliamentary systems have higher levels of affective polarisation than other kind of political systems. Only the cases of Peru and Uruguay seem to stand out among countries with a presidential system. In the case of Uruguay, we should not be surprised since it is one of the countries with one of the most stable and long-standing party systems in Latin America.

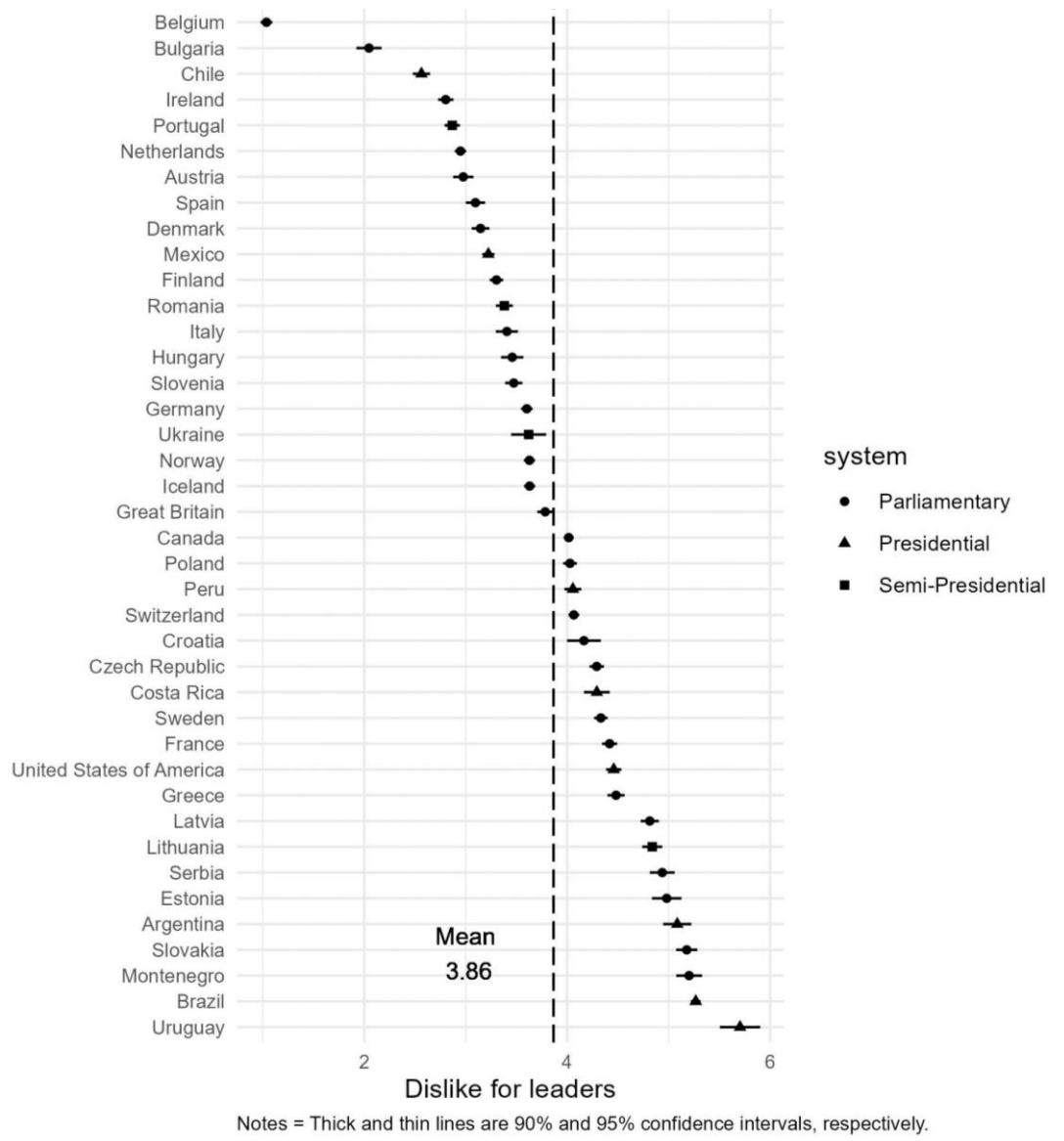
If partisanship is closely related to affective polarisation, the strength of the party system has undoubtedly allowed the construction of partisan identities in this country. On the other hand, Peru's case is puzzling as is one of the countries with the highest electoral volatility in the region, in addition to having a hyper-fragmented system. Such high levels of PAP could be due to a configuration around other political identities rather than the prolonged construction of party identification.

**Figure 3.1 Weighted spread of like-dislike scores towards parties**



**Figure 3.2** shows the mean levels of LAP, the average spread of scores of like-dislike to party leaders by country/type of regime. In this figure we can observe that countries with presidential regimes are those with the highest levels of affective polarisation towards party leaders. This could give us some clues about the importance of the figure of the leader in presidential systems as opposed to political parties.

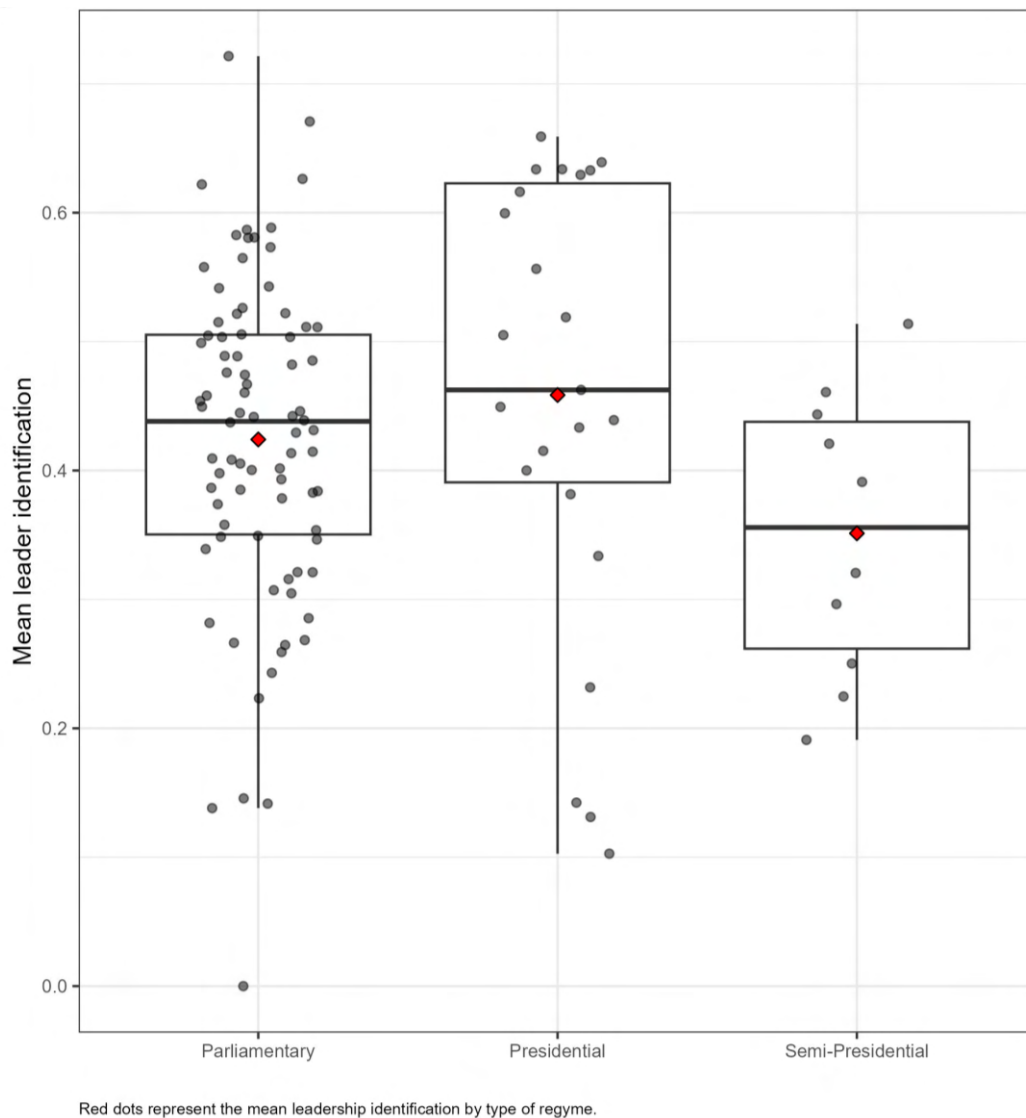
**Figure 3.2 Weighted spread of like-dislike score towards leaders.**



**Figure 3.3** shows the distribution of the leader identification by type of regime. The data in this graph shows significant heterogeneity in the levels of leadership identification by year and country. As one might expect, the average leadership identification is higher in presidential regimes than in parliamentary or mixed systems. Even if only at a descriptive level, this might give us some signals about the importance of presidential candidates in constructing identities.



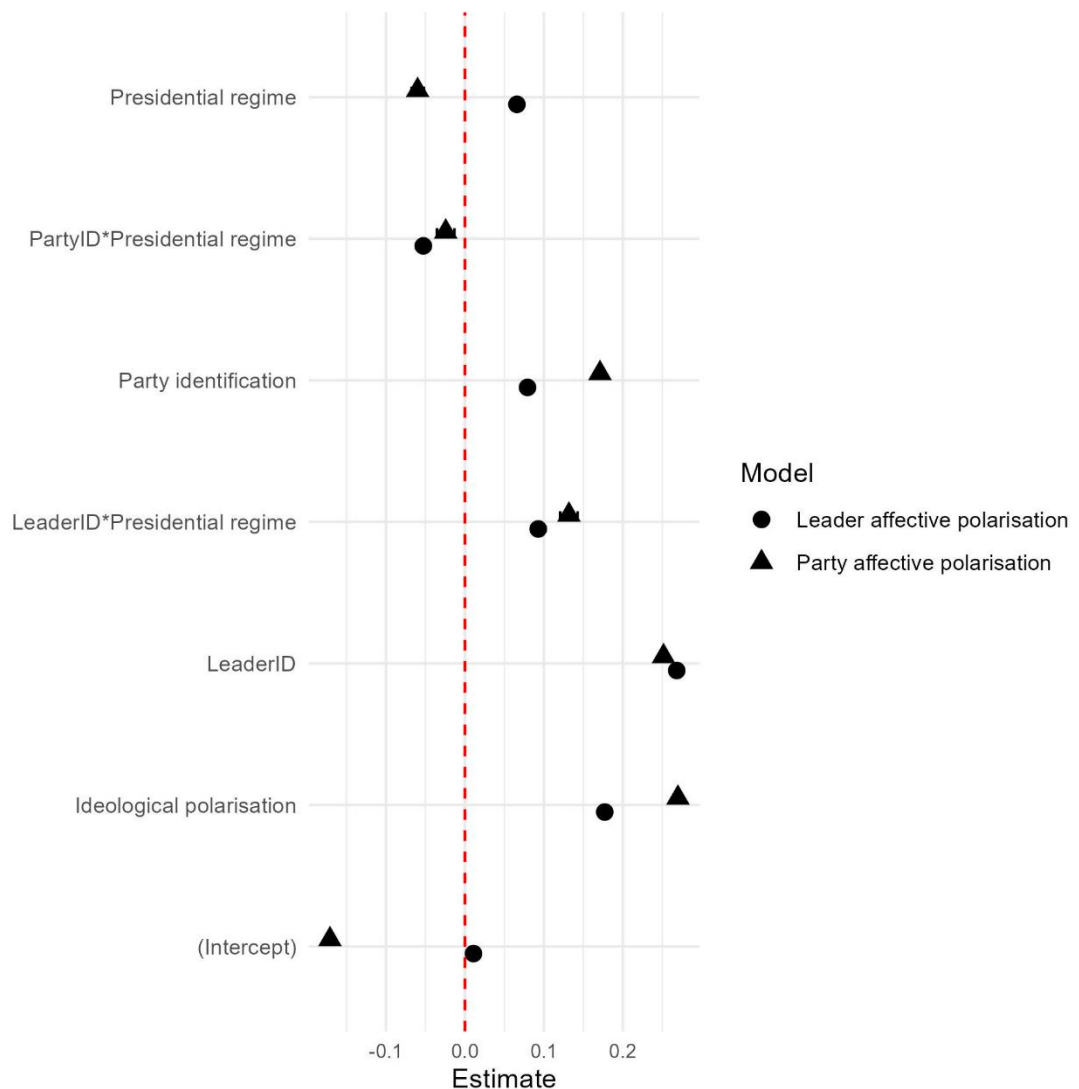
**Figure 3.3 Distribution of leader identification by type of regime**



As mentioned in the previous section, to test the hypotheses, this study employs regression models with interaction terms at the individual level. **Figure 3.4** shows the standardized regression coefficients for both measures of affective polarisation (PAP and LAP) with clustered-corrected standard errors at the country level to effectively adjust for any correlation within countries. The results yielded intriguing patterns. For Presidential Regimes, as documented by Reiljan et al. (2023), I find a negative effect on PAP, indicating that individuals who live under a presidential regime have lower affective polarisation towards political parties than the ones who live in parliamentary regimes. However, in contrast, there was a positive effect on LAP, suggesting that individuals identifying with presidential regimes are more likely to experience heightened affective polarisation towards political leaders. This way we can confirm our first expectation about the LAP being higher in presidential regimes than in

parliamentary regimes.

**Figure 3.4 Regression coefficients**



Note: Standardized regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals with cluster-corrected standard errors by country.

Control variables, including Gender and Income, are included.

Consistent with established literature, our analysis affirms the positive relationship between partisanship, ideological polarisation, and affective polarisation. The coefficients for both PAP and LAP align with the initial expectations: individuals who identify with a political party or exhibit higher levels of ideological polarisation are also more prone to heightened affective polarisation. However, an insightful nuance emerges when introducing an interaction term between party identification and presidential regimes. Unexpectedly, this interaction term demonstrates a negative effect on both LAP and PAP. This unexpected result suggests that, in the context of residing in a presidential regime, the influence of party identification on affective

polarisation is notably subdued compared to parliamentary regimes.

This finding aligns with and substantiates hypothesis 3 of this study, which posited that the role of party identification in affecting affective polarisation would vary across different political regimes. The negative interaction effect in presidential regimes suggests that, when considering the influence of living in a presidential regime, party identification plays a less prominent role compared to parliamentary regimes.

**Table 3.2 Regime regression models**

Dependent Var.:	Presidential regime		Parliamentary regime	
	PAP	LAP	PAP	LAP
Leader identification	0.0915** (0.0230)	0.0629* (0.0180)	0.0379*** (0.0098)	0.0283** (0.0090)
Party identification	0.0455 (0.0369)	0.0244 (0.0159)	0.0546*** (0.0056)	0.0362*** (0.0045)
Ideological polarisation	0.1862** (0.0495)	0.1309* (0.0486)	0.1827*** (0.0111)	0.1365*** (0.0094)
Max like party	0.6316*** (0.0328)		0.6550*** (0.0132)	
Max like leader		0.5135*** (0.0261)		0.5142*** (0.0086)
Observations	34,499	34,499	101,857	101,857
R2	0.58802	0.55679	0.57005	0.52346
Within R2	0.57127	0.54346	0.54907	0.50218

Note: Standardized regression coefficients with fixed effects and cluster-corrected standard errors by country. Control variables, including Gender and Income, are included.

Across the entire sample, our analysis reveals a compelling finding: leader identification exhibits a statistically significant positive effect on both PAP and LAP. This implies that individuals who strongly identify with political leaders, irrespective of the political regime, are more prone to heightened affective polarisation, directed towards both political parties and individual leaders. Remarkably, the data underscores a particularly striking aspect—the

magnitude of the effect of leader identification surpasses that of partisan identification. This asymmetry in impact suggests a phenomenon known as the "personalization" of politics (Garzia, 2011). Even within parliamentary regimes, the focus on individual leaders becomes more pronounced, signalling a shift in the dynamics of political identification.

**Table 3.2** displays the standardized regression coefficients of linear regression models, with country fixed-effects, for the two measures of affective polarisation - PAP and LAP. The sample is divided by political system, aiming to disentangle the relationships within each political system at the individual level. Additionally, this model adds the most liked party as a control when measuring PAP and the most liked leader as a control when measuring LAP. This control variables aims to mitigate any potential confounding effects arising from party liking or sympathy for a specific leader. By accounting for the respondents' pre-existing preferences, the study ensures a more precise examination of the influence of independent variables on affective polarisation.

The results replicate most of the findings of the interaction models, ensuring robustness in the results while enabling the identification of new insights into the dynamics of affective polarisation within specific institutional frameworks. Contrary to expectations, the study unveils a significant deviation within presidential regimes. The impact of party identification, which demonstrated significance at the initial stage of the analysis, does not hold statistical significance for either PAP (0.0455,  $p > 0.05$ ) or LAP (0.0244,  $p > 0.05$ ) within presidential systems. This finding is significant as it could suggest the prevalence of leader identification over party identity in presidential regimes. It is not challenging to conceive that in a context where political leadership is highly prominent, coupled with the ongoing trend of disenchantment with party brands, political leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the emotional states of voters. In such a scenario, the salience of political leaders appears to outweigh party affiliations, implying a shift in the influence of political figures over the emotional landscape of the electorate.

**Table 3.3 Widespread corruption regression models**

Dependent Variables	Presidential regime		Parliamentary regime	
	PAP	LAP	PAP	LAP
Widespread corruption	0.0315* (-0.0116)	0.0228* (-0.0087)	0.0240*** (-0.0078)	0.0333*** (-0.0061)
Leader identification	0.1800** (-0.0484)	0.1505** (-0.0443)	0.0207 (-0.0128)	0.0314* (-0.011)
Party identification	0.0968 (-0.0503)	0.0368 (-0.0263)	0.0661*** (-0.0063)	0.0542*** (-0.0079)
Ideological polarisation	0.1752* (-0.0646)	0.1016 (-0.0461)	0.1731*** (-0.0166)	0.1230*** (-0.0157)
Max like party	0.6306*** (-0.032)		0.6628*** (-0.0147)	
Max like leader		0.5641*** (-0.033)		0.5230*** (-0.0132)
Fit statistics				
Observations	7,232	7,232	21,115	21,115
R <sup>2</sup>	0.70852	0.74524	0.60274	0.57237
Within R <sup>2</sup>	0.70064	0.7385	0.57847	0.55483

Note: Only Module 5. Standardized regression coefficients with fixed effects and cluster-corrected standard errors by country. Control variables, including Gender and Income, are included.

Lastly, to examine the impact of perceptions of corruption on affective polarisation, **Table 3.3** shows a model focused on the individual perception of corruption. This replication model focuses exclusively on Module 5 and emphasizes the explanation related to perceptions of corruption. The results confirm the hypothesis two of this study, highlighting the positive and significant associations between affective polarisation and perceptions of corruption, providing valuable insights into how corruption perceptions shape emotional attachments to political parties and leaders.

The effects of corruption perception on affective polarisation manifest consistently across both

polarisation measures and political regimes. These findings suggest that exposure to a perceived corrupt system indeed engenders a sense of injustice, wherein one group appears to benefit at the expense of another. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the possibility of an alternative explanation, namely a dynamic interplay among corruption, distrust, and affective polarisation (Torcal & Carty, 2022). Similarly, one might posit that the mechanism operates in a comparable manner, where one group's perceived advantages stimulate negative sentiments towards the outgroup. These nuanced observations contribute to our understanding of the multifaceted relationship between corruption perceptions and affective polarisation.

### **3.6 Conclusions**

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the determinants of affective polarization, shedding light on critical insights at both individual and institutional levels. The analysis revealed substantial heterogeneity across countries, emphasizing the nuanced impact of political systems on affective polarization. Notably, parliamentary systems exhibited higher levels of PAP in comparison to other political systems, while presidential regimes have higher levels of LAP, suggesting the heightened importance of political leaders over political parties in these systems.

This study makes a theoretical proposal, introducing the concept of "leadership identification" as a crucial dimension in understanding contemporary political identities. Grounded in the acknowledgment that group leaders possess significant influence in shaping political identities, this conceptualization goes beyond the traditional evaluative/affective component of liking or disliking leaders. Instead, it incorporates a conative or intentional factor, emphasizing that leader identification extends to shaping individuals' political behaviours, such as voting.

This theoretical proposal contributes a valuable perspective to the broader discourse on political identities, shedding light on the evolving nature of affiliations and the distinct role leaders play in shaping the political landscape. Future studies can further explore and validate the concept of leadership identification, advancing our comprehension of the intricate relationships between individuals, leaders, and political affiliations in dynamic sociopolitical contexts. In this study, we find that leadership identification even surpasses the impact of partisan identification in shaping affective polarisation, signalling a shift towards the "personalization" of politics even within parliamentary regimes.

The exploration of corruption perceptions unveiled a robust positive association with affective polarisation, indicating that perceived corruption contributes to a sense of injustice and unequal benefit distribution, as proposed by De Vries and Solaz (2017). However, the implications of this relationship extend further. Affective polarisation, by reinforcing partisan bias, influences how individuals perceive and react to corruption. This bias might cause individuals to dismiss or downplay corrupt practices if they involve politicians from their preferred party, as Anduiza et al. (2013) have observed. This phenomenon can diminish the electoral impact of corruption, allowing politicians who align with voters' partisan preferences to avoid accountability (Blais et al., 2017).

This complex interplay between perceptions of corruption and affective polarisation creates a cycle that can significantly erode trust in public institutions. As affective polarisation increases, so does the likelihood of partisan bias impacting perceptions of corruption, which in turn can influence levels of trust in the political system. Corruption perceptions play a critical role in explaining political trust (Della Porta, 2000) a subject visited recently by Torcal and Thomson (2023) and Torcal and Carty (2022). Thus, in environments with heightened affective polarisation, perceptions of corruption are not only a reflection of institutional performance but also a factor that can exacerbate the polarisation itself. Consequently, this cycle of corruption perception, partisan bias, and affective polarisation poses a substantial challenge to the stability and integrity of the political landscape, making the understanding of these dynamics crucial for addressing issues of governance and public trust.

While party identification and ideological polarisation maintain their significance as predictors of affective polarisation, this study emphasizes the crucial roles of leadership identification, corruption perception, and political system characteristics—particularly in presidential systems. The insights garnered from this research hold relevance for Latin American countries, where presidential regimes prevail. For instance, the heightened influence of leader identification, coupled with interactive dynamics, underscores the importance of individual-level factors in shaping affective polarisation. In the context of Latin American presidential systems, where political leaders often play a central role, the findings provide valuable insights into how individual connections with leaders contribute to heightened affective polarisation.

Recognizing that affective polarisation is a multi-variable phenomenon, future research should delve into the impact of these additional factors, with a particular focus on the role of individual leaders' characteristics and behaviours in triggering affective polarisation. This study fills a gap

in the existing literature by examining the relationship between affective polarisation and various institutional, contextual, and individual factors. These findings contribute to our understanding of the multifaceted nature of affective polarisation, shedding light on the possibility of constructing political identities outside party identification. The heightened effect of leader identification, coupled with the interactive dynamics, underscores the relevance of individual-level dynamics in shaping affective polarisation, even in parliamentary systems influenced by personalization trends.

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## Appendix B

**Table B1 Political system by country**

	Country	System	N
1	Austria	Parliamentary	3,368
2	Belgium	Parliamentary	8,178
3	Bulgaria	Parliamentary	2,481
4	Canada	Parliamentary	18,569
5	Croatia	Parliamentary	1,004
6	Czech Republic	Parliamentary	7,689
7	Denmark	Parliamentary	5,469
8	Estonia	Parliamentary	1,000
9	Finland	Parliamentary	6,962
10	France	Parliamentary	6,844
11	Germany	Parliamentary	13,076
12	Great Britain	Parliamentary	6,308
13	Greece	Parliamentary	4,137
14	Hungary	Parliamentary	3,933
15	Iceland	Parliamentary	10,904
16	Ireland	Parliamentary	6,655
17	Italy	Parliamentary	3,440
18	Latvia	Parliamentary	3,045
19	Montenegro	Parliamentary	2,180
20	Netherlands	Parliamentary	8,187
21	Norway	Parliamentary	11,420
22	Poland	Parliamentary	9,935
23	Serbia	Parliamentary	1,568
24	Slovakia	Parliamentary	2,353
25	Slovenia	Parliamentary	5,119
26	Spain	Parliamentary	4,836
27	Sweden	Parliamentary	8,380
28	Switzerland	Parliamentary	15,666
29	Argentina	Presidential	1,406
30	Brazil	Presidential	11,156
31	Chile	Presidential	5,573
32	Costa Rica	Presidential	1,456
33	Mexico	Presidential	13,378
34	Peru	Presidential	7,394
35	United States of America	Presidential	10,279
36	Uruguay	Presidential	968
37	Lithuania	Semi-Presidential	2,509
38	Portugal	Semi-Presidential	8,419
39	Romania	Semi-Presidential	6,774
40	Ukraine	Semi-Presidential	1,148

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Note: Classification from the Democratic Electoral Systems (DES) dataset (Bormann and Golder, 2022)

## **4 Chapter 3: Splitting the crowd: consequences of Anti-Democratic Policies on political polarisation.**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Anti-democratic policies employed by rulers to suppress opposition are the clearest symptom of democratic backsliding. Rulers opt to commit fraudulent strategies to minimize the risks of losing power (Schedler, 1998). Even though first order problem such as electoral violence or extortion have attenuated with the entry of the 21st century, in the last decades, the use of institutional arrangements or judicial bodies to intervene in politics has become more frequent (Karp et al., 2018). These policies often aim to consolidate power and stifle dissent. However, what is less clear is the ramifications such policies can have beyond the suppression of the opposition. In this study, I focus aim to explore the consequences of this anti-democratic policies on affective and perceived societal polarisation. Understanding the impact of these anti-democratic measures on societal dynamics is crucial for safeguarding democratic institutions and promoting social harmony.

Elections function as a peaceful regulation of political conflicts (Przeworski, 2018). The main democratic consensus lies on the assumption that the "losers" will accept the outcome of the elections and submit to the mandate of the "winners" if only they have a chance of winning in the future as well. When rulers meddle with the elections to remain indefinitely in power resorting to, for example, instrumentalizing the electoral institution to their advantage, this political consensus breaks. Rulers resort to such arrangements rather than simply committing fraud because they need to be legitimized in the eyes of society, the rest of the political elites and the international community (Birch, 2008; Kerr & Lührmann, 2017; Przeworski, 2018).

In this paper, I argue that the use of these anti-democratic policies to undermine opposition increases political conflict as society gets more divided, and sentiments of animosity towards the opposing party get higher. To test this hypothesis, I focus on the specific case of the indefinite suspension of the 2016 recall referendum on Nicolás Maduro, president of Venezuela, a country that started to backslide to an autocracy after the arrival of Hugo Chavez in the late 90's. The suspension executed by the government-controlled electoral institution, the National Electoral Council (CNE by its Spanish acronym), serves as a pertinent example of an anti-democratic policy, and provides an opportunity to explore its consequences on



polarisation.

We usually refer to political polarisation as the deepening divide between individuals or groups with differing ideological positions. But polarisation can also arise in the form of an emotional response to people who belong to an (ideologically) similar or different group other than those with which we identify (Miller, 2020). It has been recognized as a growing concern across various democratic societies. However, far too little attention has been paid to the underlying mechanism of affective polarisation in undemocratic context so the influence of anti-democratic policies on polarisation remains unclear.

This study employs a natural experiment. Using data from the AmericasBarometer 2016 (LAPOP), which fieldwork was interrupted by the suspension, I exploit this exogenous event to estimate the causal impact of this anti-democratic measure on feelings between in-group/out-group and the perception of societal polarisation. As I argue in the next section, one would expect that the suspension of the elections would increase inter-group hostility and the perception of societal polarisation will be higher. Nevertheless, the empirical finding shows that out-group dislike only increases among members of the opposition party while those who identify with *chavismo* (the incumbent party) do not change their view about the opposition after the suspension.

The experimental work presented here provides one of the first investigations into how the use of anti-democratic policies to undermine opposition drives out-group dislike of the “losers”, but the “winners” attitudes remain the same. This challenges the idea that all voters, independently about the performance of their party, cares about the fairness of the electoral rules. The findings should make an important contribution to the field of affective polarisation and democratic backsliding literature as it provides new insights about the mechanism of affective polarisation in undemocratic contexts. This paper is structured as follows. First, I will explain about the theoretical framework and how the use of fraudulent strategies to reduce the government's chance of losing can intensify negative intergroup feelings. Then, I will discuss the identification strategy, a natural experiment, to test my hypotheses and finally discuss the results.

## **4.2 Theoretical framework**

No one likes to lose. We know that, even in democracies, rulers' resort to fraudulent strategies

to remain in power. Political violence or extortion has been attenuated as common forms of voter suppression with the entry of the 21st century. But more "refined" ways of electoral intervention are becoming more frequent. For example, in the United States, the manipulation of electoral boundaries and constituencies (gerrymandering) to disproportionately benefit the ruling party or candidate is very common.

As legitimacy is fundamental for the stability of the regime (Norris, 2004), even in autocratic countries, rulers often employ more subtle strategies of electoral manipulation rather than resorting to overt and blatant fraud. These strategies are designed to create an illusion of democratic processes while ensuring the desired outcome in favour of the ruling regime (Przeworski, 2018). One common approach involves manipulating electoral laws and regulations to restrict political competition and hinder the participation of opposition parties or candidates (Norris et al., 2013). This can take the form of imposing onerous registration requirements, limiting access to media and campaign resources, or employing state resources to bolster their own campaigns (Birch, 2008). In short, these strategies refer to antidemocratic policies employed by the incumbent aimed to limit opposition in a "subtle" way, so that their legitimacy is not questioned.

Existing research has demonstrated that the perception of procedural unfairness during elections can lead to negative attitudes towards democracy and increased distrust in political institutions (McAllister & White, 2015; Norris et al., 2013). However, an intriguing question arises: do all voters perceive this injustice in the same way? Could those who benefit, often referred to as the "winners," interpret the electoral process differently? While previous studies have yielded mixed results, recent experimental research by Daoust et al. (2023) suggests that voters, regardless of their party's performance, care about the fairness of the electoral procedure. Nevertheless, these experimental findings have not yet been substantiated with real-world data that examines whether partisanship can moderate the effect of procedural fairness.

When rulers strategically suppress opposition voices and limit political competition, they create an environment where diverse political perspectives are marginalized or silenced by the dominant group. Meddling with elections not only erodes trust in democratic processes but also hinders the potential resolution of intergroup conflicts through fair electoral competition. Intergroup antagonism is driven by group identification and alienation from other groups (Esteban & Ray, 2008). In this paper, I argue that when undemocratic policies are employed to undermine opposition, they contribute to increased political polarisation within societies as

they exacerbate interpersonal antagonisms.

The influence of electoral processes on public perceptions and political polarisation is a complex interplay. What is clear is that elections, whether fair or not, play a significant role in shaping polarisation. Hernandez et al. (2021) demonstrated that elections heighten ideological differences between parties, leading to increased ideological polarisation, which, in turn, enhances affective polarisation. Affective polarisation refers to citizens feeling more negativity towards parties outside their own while intensifying positive feelings towards their in-group. This phenomenon builds on the concept of partisanship as a social and expressive identity (Huddy et al., 2015) but introduces an out-group bias that adds a new dimension to the traditional focus on positive in-group identification (Harteveld & Wagner, 2022). Affective polarisation also has ideological underpinnings, as group identities are rooted in divergent ideological positions (Hernández et al., 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2022).

While ideological polarisation can mobilize political competition, affective polarisation carries a more emotional component that can be detrimental. It poses a significant risk to the health and quality of modern democracies by distorting the distinction between political adversaries and enemies, ultimately undermining the cooperative foundations of democratic governance.

Moreover, elections present threats to one's in-party as partisans are presented with the opportunity to defend their party against potential losses or ensure gains (Huddy et al., 2015). Being under the potential threat of electoral consequences can result in the reinforcement of positive identities, which could subsequently evoke powerful mobilizing emotions, such as enthusiasm or anger (Harteveld & Wagner, 2022). In addition, affective polarisation is likely to do more than mere positive in-group feelings to raise the perceived stakes of an election. The deeper the intergroup conflict, the more important it becomes to one's self-image not to lose out to the outgroup. As noted by Huddy et al. (2015) the internalization of the partisan identity could mean for the partisan that the party's failures and victories become personal.

A distinct, though related, "layer" of polarisation is peoples' perceptions about the conceptual distance between the parties and candidates (Enders & Armaly, 2019). As one might imagine, an individual's assessment of the political situation can affect his or her political attitudes or shape its behaviour as people usually act based on their perception of the world. This is particularly problematic because often, individuals overestimate the amount of polarisation in society (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2016).

Evidence shows that perceptions of polarisation are related to participation in campaign activities and issue attitude extremity (Westfall et al., 2015), affect reactions to political stimuli by lowering external efficacy and trust toward government (Enders & Armaly, 2019), and make people less likely to change their mind (De Zúñiga et al., 2022). Overall, individuals declaring that society is highly polarized are more prone to feel a “greater need to support their own political group” (Westfall et al., 2015), and more likely to grasp strong divisions between groups, both tapping into programmatic and identity aspects (De Zúñiga et al., 2022). While there is evidence on the effects of perceived social polarisation, we know little about what factors may generate it.

My theoretical model is based on the following given that elections are the main mechanism for resolving political conflict and influencing political decisions in modern democracies, if citizens perceive that elections are rigged in favour of one group, it will intensify inter-group conflict and increase polarisation. However, I argue that, as these strategies severely affect only the opposition’s chances of winning, the negative feelings from the opposition towards the incumbents’ party are going to be stronger than the other way around.

### **4.3 Case study: Venezuela**

Venezuela works as a good case study to understand the societal consequences of governments using undemocratic policies to undermine the opposition. In this paper, I examine the effects of one of this policies on polarisation: the indefinite suspension of the 2016 recall referendum (10/21/2016) on Nicolás Maduro by the National Electoral Council (CNE). This study employs a natural experiment. I will use data from the AmericasBarometer 2016 (LAPOP), whose fieldwork started just before the suspension of the recall referendum was officially announced and finished 3 months after the event.

About Venezuela as a case study, with the rise of Hugo Chávez to the Presidency of the Republic in 1998, Venezuela has undergone an important political change, especially its ruling elite. The confrontational style of politics, together with the fact that a large part of society has resisted the governmental policies of the Chavista pole, caused the country to enter a political crisis of great proportions that has shaken the political life of all Venezuelans. Particularly since the year 2000, once the electoral events related to the constituent process and the relegitimization of public powers were concluded, the crisis became more pronounced. Indeed, in the last months of 2001 and particularly since 2002, when there was a coup d’état, the

radicalization of political actors, the polarisation of society and the attacks on democracy have been the dominant signs of recent years.

Under the rule of Chávez, Venezuela slowly but decisively entered a process of democratic backsliding. The process involved the erosion of liberal, participatory, and minimal democracy (Corrales, 2020). Since the very beginning the regime started tinkering with both the judicial and electoral branches (Kornblith, 2007). Even though the regime still exhibited frequent electoral activity to uphold democratic credential, as Corrales (2020) reports, at least one electoral irregularity occurred in almost every election. With time, democratic erosion accelerated and started to show signs of a more authoritarian regime. From repression of protests to pursuing political opponents and censoring media, the regime focused on centralizing power and eliminating any limit on the executive's ability to grip on power.

A strong clientelist network, financed mainly through oil revenues, allowed Chávez, and later Maduro (to a lesser extent), to count on strong popular support (Bull & Rosales, 2020). The turning point came with the triumph of the opposition which, in the elections for the National Assembly (parliament) on December 6, 2015, managed to build a legislative super majority. It was conceived by the adherents to that option, as the way to overcome the generalized crisis. From this new majority, the entire opposition began to mobilize for a national recall referendum. This is a constitutional mechanism that allows that:

*“All positions and magistratures of popular election may be revoked. Once half of the term for which the official was elected has elapsed, no less than twenty percent of the voters registered in the corresponding constituency may request the calling of a referendum to revoke his or her mandate.”* (Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Second Section, Chapter IV, Article 72)

This is not the first time the opposition has called for a recall referendum. In 2004, a referendum was held on President Chávez, which he won by a wide margin<sup>13</sup>. Three stages are required to complete the recall process<sup>14</sup>:

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<sup>13</sup> Election results can be found at the following URL:

[http://www.cne.gob.ve/referendum\\_presidencial2004](http://www.cne.gob.ve/referendum_presidencial2004)

<sup>14</sup> This is a summary of the process regulated in the Resolution No. 070207-036 dated February 7, 2007, on rules to regulate the procedure for promotion and request of revocatory referendums for elected public offices.

- (1) In the first stage the interested parties must collect the manifested will (signatures) of at least 1% of registered voters throughout the country.
- (2) Once the collected signatures have been verified and approved, the CNE must set the date along with the centres in the national territory where the signatures will be collected. Within three days, twenty percent of signatures must be collected along with the fingerprints of voters registered with the CNE.
- (3) Finally, once it is verified that at least 20% of valid signatures have been collected, the CNE must set a date for a general election and ask the people if they wish to recall the president; a number equal to or greater than the number of votes the president obtained in the 2013 elections must be submitted. For the 2016 referendum, would mean getting at least 7.587.578+1 votes in favour of recall.

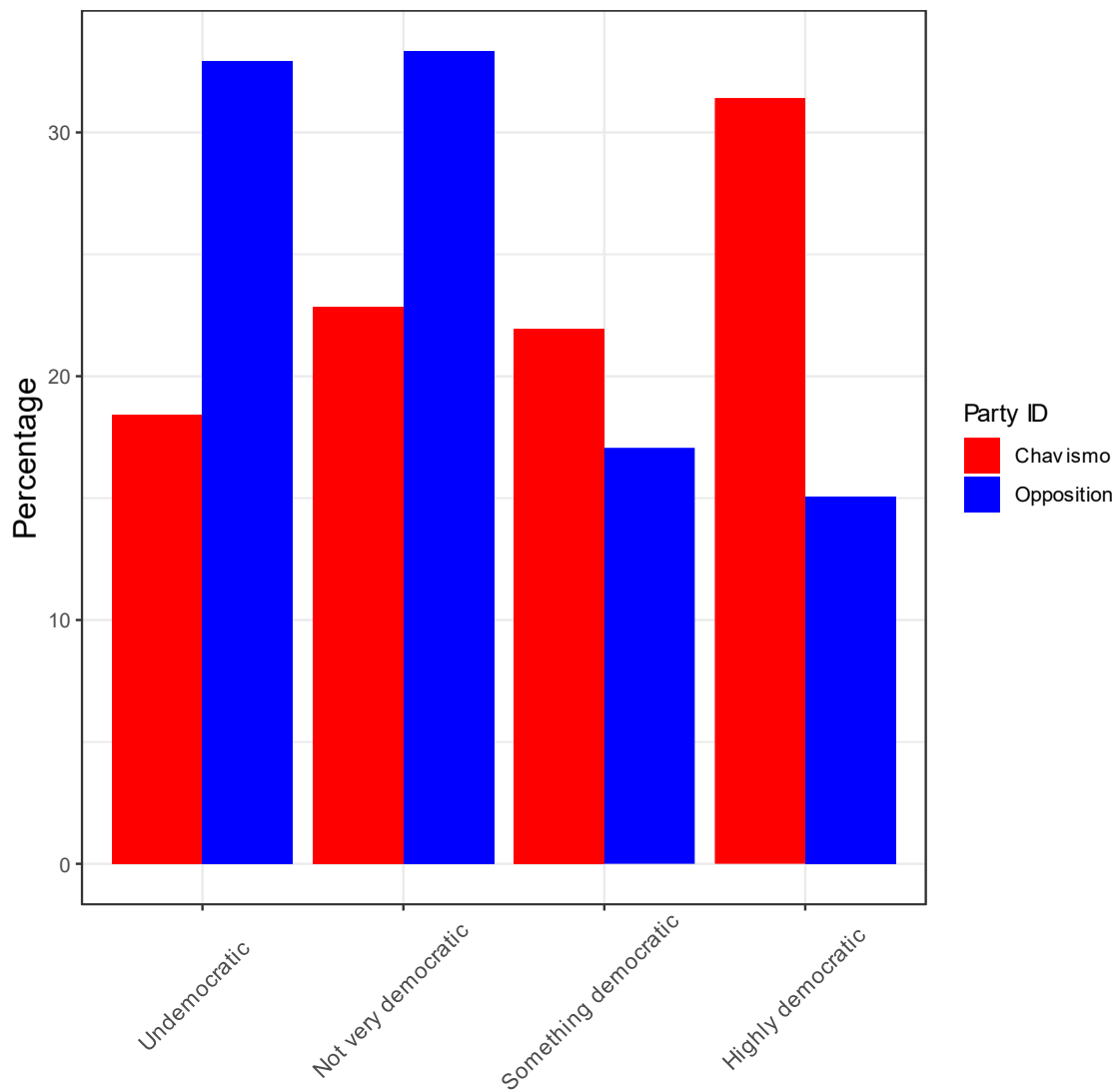
One might think that being in a non-democratic regime, the opposition would hardly find incentives to participate in electoral events as the government would hardly be willing to cede power. However, despite de censorship, the opposition successfully mobilised the public to participate in the process. Of the 1% of registered voters (194,708 voters) needed to pass the first stage, the opposition managed to turn out 1,957,779 voters, ten times more than required by law. One can find some explanation of this behaviour in the public's assessments of the state of democracy in Venezuela. Even though different external indicators report that Venezuela is not a democratic country (Coppedge et al., 2017; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017), individuals perception think otherwise.

**Figure 4.1** shows perceptions of democracy according to party identification prior to the referendum's suspension. The figure exposes a pronounced divide between government supporters and the opposition. A substantial segment of government supporters continued to view Venezuela as a democracy, in stark contrast to opposition members, who largely disagreed. This disparity highlights how partisan bias may shape perceptions of democratic quality, corroborating existing research on assessment bias in highly affectively polarized environments (Iyengar et al., 2019). Such divergent views on the state of democracy underscore the perceived stakes of each electoral event, seen either as a threat to or a potential saviour of democratic principles (Huddy et al., 2015).

The opposition's faith in the recall referendum as a lawful route to challenge the authoritarian regime suggests a residual belief in democratic mechanisms. This reliance on constitutional processes, despite ongoing democratic erosion, indicates a steadfast commitment to democratic

ideals. Conversely, if Chavismo truly believes in the democratic nature of Venezuela, then exposure to unjust actions against their political adversaries might be judged unfavourably. In other words, if Chavismo perceives themselves as part of a democratic society, any perceived injustice against the opposition could elicit empathy or disapproval, highlighting an expectation of adherence to democratic norms.

**Figure 4.1 Perception of democracy by party identification**



The referendum was suspended by the CNE on October 21, 2016, between the second and third stage, when the process of collecting signatures for getting twenty percent of the registered voters was about to begin. This was a surprising measure, never carried out by the regime, because, as previously explained, it was the norm to participate in electoral processes to maintain a minimal democracy.

The recall referendum had significant levels of support and it was clear that it threatened the continuity of *chavismo* in the government. **Table 4.1** shows the distribution of support for the recall referendum options before its suspension.

**Table 4.1 Support for the Recall Referendum (Pre-suspension)**

	%	n
Abstain	29.55	219
Against	15.25	113
In favour	55.19	409

If we assume that individuals can evaluate the political environment, they will also be sensitive to any event that is unfair to a particular group, regardless of whether they belong to that group. That is why it is expected that:

*H1. The suspension of the recall referendum increased the perceptions of societal polarisation.*

Tinkering with the electoral institution to perpetuate the winner in power, could have produced higher sentiments of animosity between groups. However, this measure was put in place strategically to undermine specifically the opposition. Therefore, it is expected that:

*H2. The suspension of the Recall Referendum increased the levels of affective polarisation more on those who identified with the opposition.*

#### **4.4 Data and model**

The dependent variables of this study are: 1. Affective polarisation, and 2. Perceived Societal polarisation. The data used for constructing the measures come from a set of questions found in the AmericasBarometer 2016 (Cohen et al., 2017). The selection of respondents applies quotas by sex, age and income level, variables that will serve to control the variable in the design that I will explain next.

For the perceived societal polarisation variable, I use a measure based on respondents' assessment of political polarisation in the society overall. In doing so, we hope to get individuals' broader assessment of polarisation among a diverse set of entities and actors (De



Zúñiga et al., 2022). For the measurement of affective polarisation, I use two different measures: first I use Wagner's (2021) formula for measuring Affective Polarisation in multi-party systems which is the spread of like-dislike scores. I use a reverse like-dislike scale where the respondents were asked: *Thinking about the different political groups and parties currently in Venezuela, would you say your general opinion of people who are Chavistas/Opposition is very favourable, somewhat favourable, neutral, somewhat unfavourable, or very unfavourable?*". Nevertheless, as I am interested in measuring heterogeneous effects between political preferences, I use sentiments towards voters and create a weighted mean of negative feelings index (WMNF), based on the one used by Torcal and Carty (2022) as an alternative measure of affective polarisation. This last measure is a scale ranging from 0 to 5 (this being the maximum of negative feelings) which is the weighted average of negative feelings (anger, anxiety, and fear) towards out-party members.

This paper explores the differences between four groups: on the one hand, the treatment and control group defined by the suspension of the recall referendum and on the other hand, the differences between-party identification (Chavismo - Opposition). If we analyse descriptively our dependent variables, we will find significant differences between these groups. Figure 1 shows the differences in the means of negative feelings to the out-group before and after the suspension of the referendum between *chavismo* and opposition. We can observe that there seems to be a heterogeneous effect determined by party identification. On the one hand, the negative feelings of the opposition increased by 0.2 points while for *chavismo* they decreased by about 0.5. As for the perception of societal polarisation, counter-intuitively, occurs somewhat the opposite. Pre-suspension, the levels of polarisation were further apart between the two groups and post-suspension, despite remaining relatively stable, they become closer to each other. For the opposition it seems to decrease and for Chavismo it seems to increase.

To estimate these causal effects, I use an unexpected events during survey design method as proposed for Muñoz et al. (2020). A simple comparison of the behaviour of the dependent variable prior to the suspension of the referendum and after the suspension (pre-post) would be problematic because there would be the possibility that unobservable variables would confound the effect of the dependent variables studied. Therefore, to measure this impact in isolation, we assume the exogeneity of the event as initially most of the population would not assume that the decision of the suspension would be related to any of the dependent variables. Assuming the randomness of the event will allow us to take the individuals surveyed before the event as

control group and test the effect with the ones who were surveyed after (treatment group). However, I have performed a series of test and robustness checks to assess for any violations of assumptions<sup>15</sup> that would preclude any causal inference.

First, I check for significant differences between different attributes of the control and treatment groups. The **Table C2** (See appendix) shows this comparison and demonstrates that the number of observations in each group is balanced and there are no significant differences between the two groups. Although there are some variables with a higher deviation (income and gender), I will control for them in the model.

To check the randomness of the timing of the event, I conducted a thorough search in the main media outlets of Venezuela to show that, although the recall referendum was an important news event due to the significant mobilization generated by this process, its suspension was a "surprise". There was no speculation that it would be suspended, and it was news only from the day it happened (10/21/2016). The **Figure C1** (See appendix) illustrates this argument. We observe daily google searches regarding the suspension of the referendum peak one day after it occurred.

#### 4.5 Results

Initially, I ran a simple OLS regression model to examine whether the mere suspension of the recall referendum had any effect on any of the dependent variables and the results are displayed on **Table 4.2**. Following Muñoz et al (2020), because the event occurred on October 21, 2016, I excluded all those surveyed that day from the analysis. In the model, the treatment group takes the value of "1" for all those interviewed after the event and "0" for all those interviewed before.

The results for this naive model show no effect for any of the three dependent variables. On a second model, I added a running variable ranging from -18 to 43 that represents the days of fieldwork before and after the survey, being "0" on the event day (21/10/2016). The interaction of these two variables represents our base estimate. This interaction model incorporates balance

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<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the Americas Barometer 2016 does not have in its supplementary information on the frequency of non-response or the characteristics of sample units that did not participate in the survey. I assume this to be a limitation of this paper. However, I already perform some tests to guarantee the ignorability assumption.

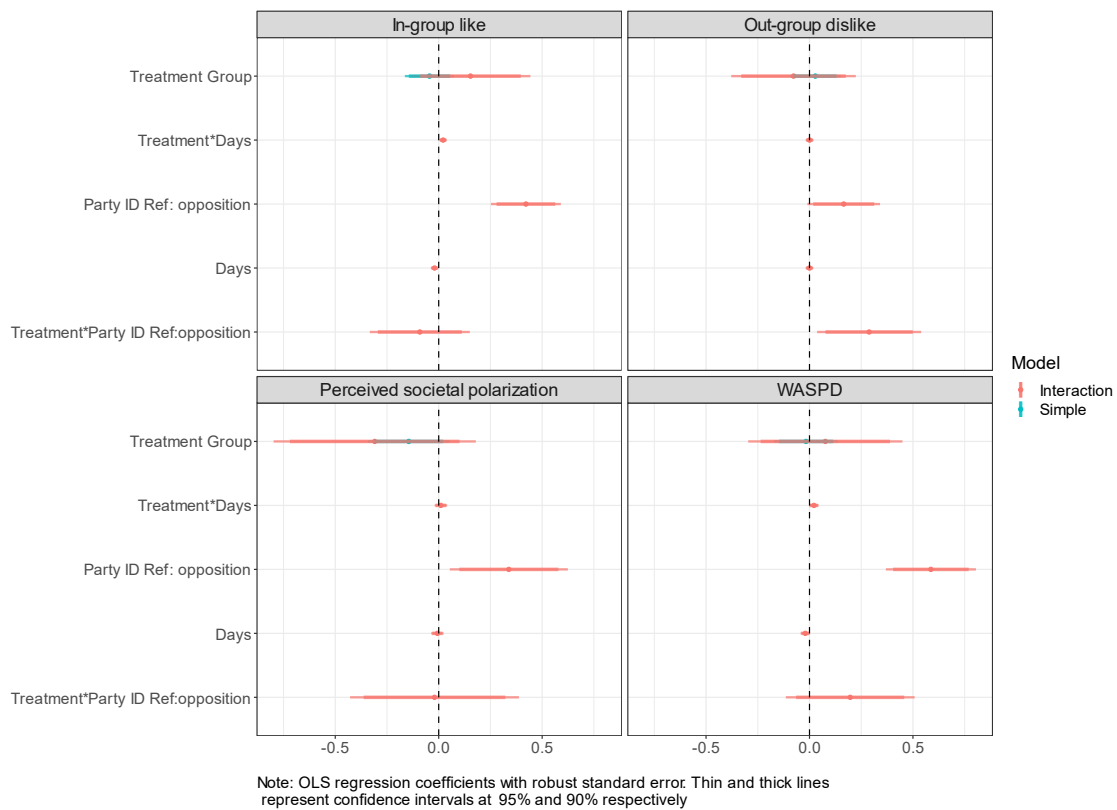
covariates. To check if the event had a heterogeneous effect on opposition members, I added a dummy variable that takes 1 when a person identifies with an opposition party and voted for the opposition in the previous elections and "0" when neither condition occurs.

**Table 4.2 Simple model regression**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	WASPD (1)	In-group like (2)	Out-group dislike (3)
Treatment Group	-0.017 (0.079)	-0.045 (0.061)	0.028 (0.063)
Constant	2.086*** (0.056)	3.936*** (0.042)	4.150*** (0.044)
Observations	978	978	978
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00005	0.001	0.0002
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.001	-0.0005	-0.001
Residual Std. Error (df = 976)	1.241	0.948	0.978
F Statistic (df = 1; 976)	0.046	0.546	0.198
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

The results are plotted in **Figure 4.2**. In this case, we see that those who identify with the opposition have higher levels of both affective polarisation (on all three measures) and a higher perception of societal polarisation. Furthermore, the interaction between identifying with the opposition and being exposed to treatment (after the suspension of the referendum) has a positive and statistically positive effect ( $p < 0.1$ ) on the levels of out-group dislike.

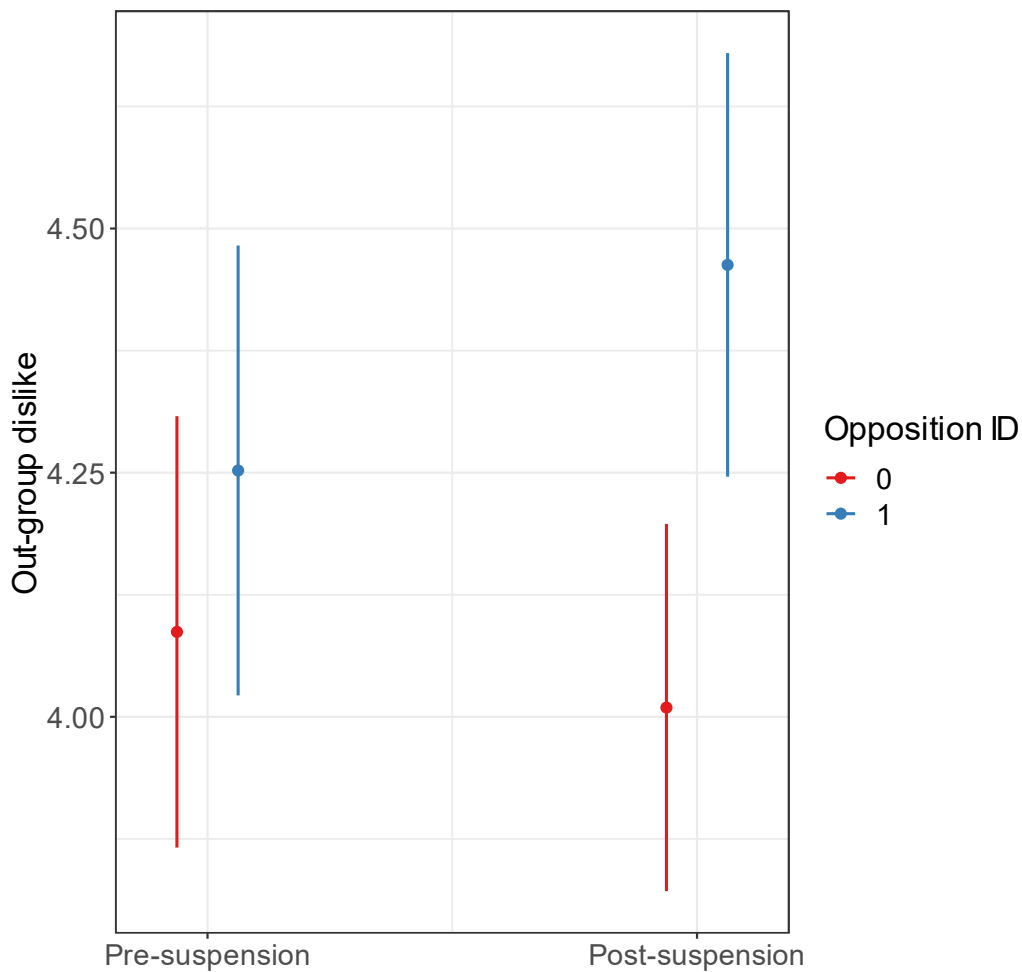
**Figure 4.2 Regression coefficients**



Specifically, identifying with the opposition and having experienced the suspension of the referendum increases the mean levels of negative feelings around 0.5p as shown in **Figure 4.3**. It is worth noting that neither the assessment of the out-group nor the perception of societal polarisation changes for the members of the incumbent party after the suspension of the referendum.

This is a rather significant results as it contradicts previous findings about individuals being rational and sensitive to procedural unfairness. These results suggest that attitudes of the hegemonic party towards the dominant group do not change when the incumbent employs a measure to undermine it. It is only the aggrieved group that significantly increases its negative feelings towards members of the ruling party. These results also show no sign of any of the groups increasing their positive identity towards its in-party.

**Figure 4.3 Predicted values for Out-group dislike.**



Furthermore, To confirm that there is a significant increase in negative feelings towards the out-group an alternative measure of out-group dislike could be considered. Employing items about sentiments towards out-group voters, I create a weighted mean of negative feelings index (WMNF), based on the one used by Torcal and Carty (2022) as an alternative measure of affective polarisation. This last measure is a scale ranging from 0 to 5 (this being the maximum of negative feelings) which is the weighted average of negative feelings (anger, anxiety, and fear) towards out-party members.

The results of the robustness test are shown in **Table 4.3**. From the data of this table, the results for the weighted average of negative feelings measure are quite similar to our initial measure of out-group dislike. Therefore, we can confirm that the suspension of the recall referendum significantly increased opposition members' negative feelings towards Chavismo.

**Table 4.3 Robustness test regression results**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Negative feelings		Out-group dislike	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment	-0.039 (0.275)	-0.091 (0.275)	-0.077 (0.154)	-0.079 (0.173)
Treatment*Days	0.023 (0.017)	0.018 (0.017)	0.0002 (0.009)	-0.004 (0.011)
Treatment*Party ID:Opposition	0.442* (0.226)	0.431* (0.225)	0.288** (0.128)	0.281** (0.142)
Days	-0.022 (0.017)	-0.016 (0.017)	-0.0002 (0.009)	0.004 (0.011)
Party ID: opposition	0.537*** (0.160)	0.571*** (0.160)	0.165* (0.090)	0.205** (0.101)
Constant	2.443*** (0.218)	2.756*** (0.249)	4.087*** (0.121)	4.160*** (0.156)
Observations	798	798	978	798
R <sup>2</sup>	0.061	0.074	0.028	0.035
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.055	0.064	0.023	0.024
Residual Std. Error	1.548 (df = 792)	1.541 (df = 788)	0.966 (df = 972)	0.969 (df = 788)
F Statistic	10.275*** (df = 5; 792)	7.022*** (df = 9; 788)	5.628*** (df = 5; 972)	3.185*** (df = 9; 788)

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01

## 4.6 Discussion

The findings of this paper both meets and challenges the initial expectations. The empirical evidence unearthed through the analysis of the natural experiment provides a profound understanding of the societal and political rifts that characterize contemporary Venezuelan politics under it process of democratic backsliding and its implication for societal behaviour.

The initial expectation of this paper was that the partisan instrumentalization of an "impartial" institution, such as the electoral body, would amplify perceptions of societal polarisation (H1). The preliminary data suggested that the significant mobilization of the opposition in surpassing

the required threshold for the first stage of the referendum indicated a clear threat to the continuity of Chavismo in the government. The suspension of the recall referendum set the stage for anticipating heightened societal polarisation due to the perceived unfairness of the suspension electoral process. However, the empirical results contradict this expectation, showing that while there was a trend towards increased societal polarisation, the anticipated broad effect did not manifest as strongly as hypothesized.

The second hypothesis (H2) posited that the suspension of the recall referendum would enhance affective polarisation. The data did not show a uniform increase in negative sentiments across the board, but rather a differentiated effect. Using unexpected events during survey design, provided clear evidence that the suspension of the referendum indeed polarized opposition members more intensely. This aligns with our expectations that anti-democratic manoeuvres would increase affective polarisation in the individuals who identify with the opposition more than the ones who identify with the incumbent party. The findings are particularly striking and contributes to the literature by showcasing that experiences of perceived procedural unfairness can lead to significant increases in negative feelings towards the ruling party among the aggrieved group.

This discrepancy is particularly illuminating when viewed through the lens of the winners and losers' theory. The results indicate that the "winners" in this scenario do not undergo a substantial shift in their perceptions of the out-group nor enhance their in-group favouritism, despite benefiting from democratic backsliding. This could be attributed to a variety of factors, including a sense of vindication, a belief in the legitimacy of the incumbents' actions, or simply a lack of empathy towards the opposition (Balinhas, 2023; Plescia, 2019).

Conversely, the "losers," or opposition identifiers, have their feelings of animosity towards the ruling party exacerbated by the suspension of the referendum. This finding corroborates the theory that the aggrieved party in cases of democratic backsliding experiences a heightened sense of injustice, leading to increased polarisation. The opposition's intensified negative feelings towards the incumbents likely stem from a perceived attack on democratic norms and fair play, which they value and expect in the political arena.

The implications of these findings are profound, suggesting that democratic backsliding does not affect all segments of society equally, and that the emotional consequences are heavily influenced by partisan allegiance and the perceived impact on one's political agency. The

study's nuanced approach, utilizing the unexpected events during survey design method, allows for a precise dissection of these effects, demonstrating that the consequences of antidemocratic policies are acutely felt by those whose political aspirations are thwarted.

#### **4.7 Conclusions**

In conclusion, the findings of this research shed light on the impact of antidemocratic policies employed by the rulers to undermine the opposition on political polarisation. The suspension of the recall referendum in Venezuela as a form of democratic backsliding vividly demonstrates how such measures exacerbate affective polarisation, particularly among opposition supporters. This escalation of negative sentiments is a testament to the detrimental effects of undemocratic tactics, which not only deepen societal divisions but also warp the emotional landscape of politics.

However, the absence of a significant effect on the perception of societal polarisation raises intriguing questions. It appears that the broader assessment of the political context did not interpret the suspension of the recall referendum as an event that significantly contributed to the overall polarisation within society. Instead, it may have been viewed as exacerbating an already existing division within a specific segment of the population. This nuanced outcome highlights the complexity of political polarisation and suggests that not all events or actions, including a measure clearly employed to block the opposition and keep the power, are perceived in the same way by the public.

It underscores the importance of considering the broader political context and the dynamics of group identification when assessing the impact of political decisions on societal polarisation. In essence, this paper findings illustrate that political polarisation is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a myriad of factors, and understanding its nuances requires a comprehensive examination of both emotional and societal dimensions.

The robustness checks and the use of alternative measures of affective polarisation, such as the weighted mean of negative feelings index (WMNF), add further credibility to these findings. The consistency of the results across different measures confirms the reliability of the observed effects and supports the conclusion that the suspension of the recall referendum acted as a catalyst for increased affective polarisation among the opposition.

Moreover, the opposition's mobilisation and the public's differentiated perceptions of



democracy reveal a multifaceted picture of affective polarisation. The public's engagement, even in a constrained democratic environment, illustrates a commitment to democratic ideals and a belief in the power of electoral processes. This active participation, despite the authoritarian context, suggests that citizens' perceptions of democracy and their trust in constitutional mechanisms play a pivotal role in shaping their responses to political events.

Considering these insights, we see that affective polarisation in the context of Latin American politics—and potentially beyond—is intricately tied to the dynamics of power and perceptions of democratic legitimacy. The Venezuelan case serves as a cautionary tale of how democratic backsliding can deepen societal fissures, emphasizing the critical need for fair and transparent political processes to maintain social harmony and cohesion.

Lastly, it becomes evident that affective polarisation is not only a matter of differing political views but also a reflection of the broader struggle for democratic integrity. The differentiated impact on winners and losers underscores the importance of ensuring democratic resilience to prevent the deepening of societal divides and the erosion of political trust. These findings contribute a vital perspective to the study of affective polarisation, particularly in contexts where democracy is under strain.

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exacerbate the perceived partisan divide. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*,  
10(2), 145–158.

## Appendix C

Figure C1 Google trends plot

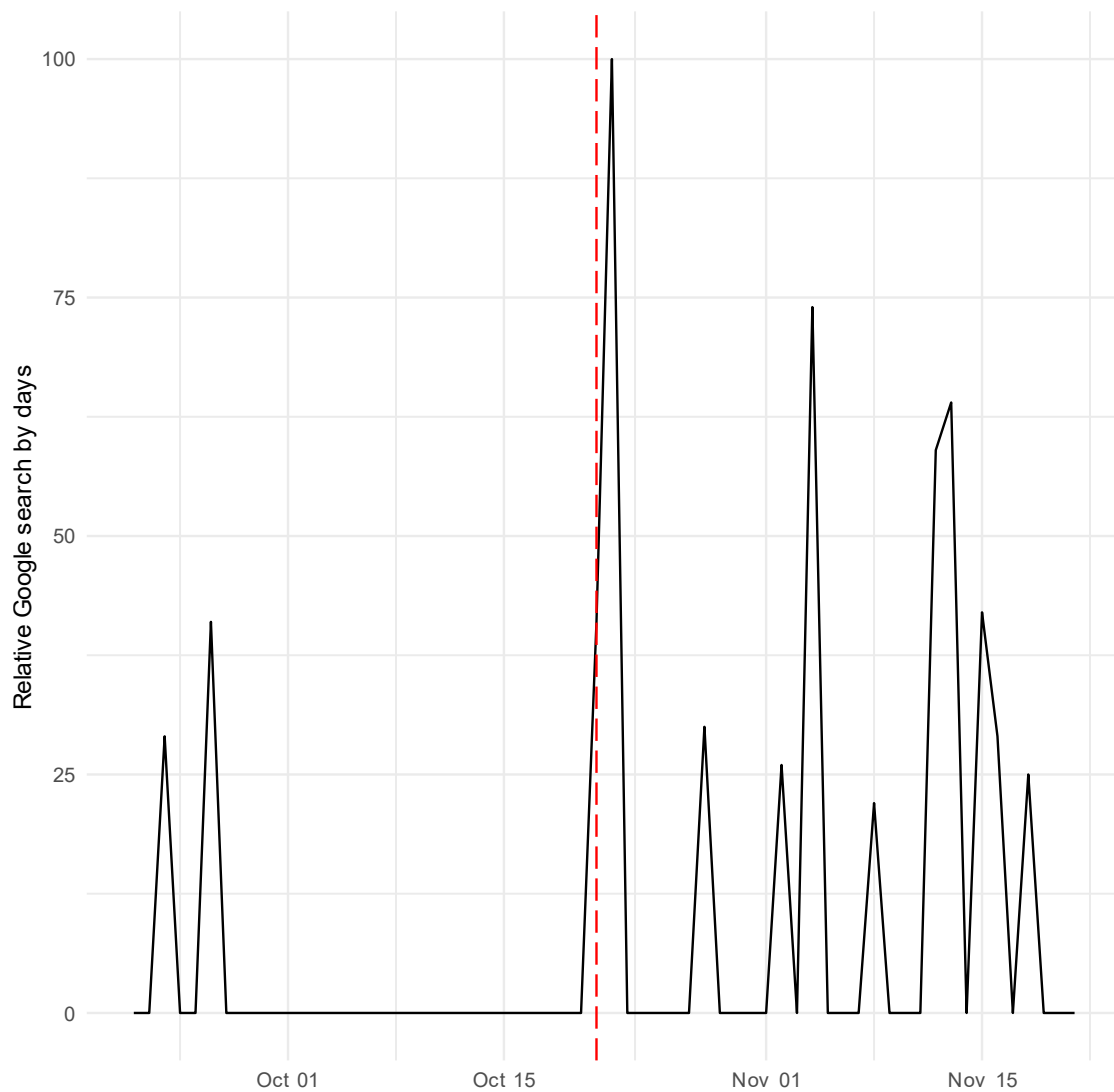


Table C1 Descriptive statistics pre - post treatment

	Pre-suspension	Post-suspension	Dif
Observations	790	768	22
Men	46.840	52.730	-5.890
Women	53.160	47.270	5.890
18-44 years	60.600	61.310	-0.710
44-65 years	32.510	30.790	1.720
> 65 years	6.890	7.900	-1.010
Low income	33.540	21.740	11.800
Middle-low income	17.010	12.580	4.430

Middle-high income	16.060	14.290	1.770
High income	33.390	51.400	-18.010
Party ID: Chavismo	41.530	40.620	0.910
Party ID: opposition	58.470	59.380	-0.910

*Note: Difference in the mean of the covariates between the treatment and control groups*

**Table C2 Interaction models regression results**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	WASPD (1)	In-group like (2)	Out-group dislike (3)	Perceived societal polarization (4)
Treatment*Party ID Ref:opposition	-0.309 (0.249)	0.076 (0.190)	0.154 (0.148)	-0.077 (0.154)
Days	-0.007 (0.015)	-0.020* (0.012)	-0.020** (0.009)	-0.0002 (0.009)
Party ID Ref: opposition	0.339** (0.146)	0.587*** (0.111)	0.421*** (0.086)	0.165* (0.090)
Treatment*Days	0.011 (0.015)	0.021* (0.012)	0.021** (0.009)	0.0002 (0.009)
Treatment Group	-0.020 (0.208)	0.197 (0.159)	-0.091 (0.123)	0.288** (0.128)
Constant	5.887*** (0.196)	1.640*** (0.150)	3.553*** (0.116)	4.087*** (0.121)
Observations	978	978	978	978
R <sup>2</sup>	0.017	0.075	0.043	0.028
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.012	0.070	0.038	0.023
Residual Std. Error (df = 972)	1.569	1.196	0.929	0.966
F Statistic (df = 5; 972)	3.275***	15.759***	8.675***	5.628***

*Note:*

\* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01



## 5 Conclusions

Affective polarisation, or the heightened negativity towards opposing political partisans and favouritism towards co-partisans, is considered a global trend (Gidron et al., 2020; Iyengar et al., 2019; Reiljan et al., 2023). Addressing a gap in the current literature, which predominantly focuses on the United States and Europe, this study has sought to uncover the dynamics and implications of affective polarisation within the volatile and complex landscape of Latin American politics. By investigating this phenomenon from both individual and elite perspectives, the research has provided nuanced insights into the factors shaping political attitudes and behaviours in this region. The following pages synthesize the key findings, their theoretical and practical implications, reflections on the methodological approaches employed, and outline potential avenues for future research in this relevant field of political science.

The initial objective of this research was to examine the determinants of affective polarisation in Latin America, seeking to adapt a concept predominantly rooted in Western theoretical frameworks to a distinct regional context. This exploration was driven by a desire to understand how mechanisms, typically used to explain affective polarisation in Western societies, apply within the distinct socio-political landscape of Latin America. This region is characterised by less stable, more volatile party systems (Moraes & Béjar, 2023), factors that profoundly influence the construction of partisan identities (Lupu, 2011). Furthermore, in this region, multi-party systems are mostly presidential regimes that display trends of hyper-personalism (Dix, 1992; Rhodes-Purdy & Madrid, 2020). Additionally, Latin America's marked decline in democratic practices over the past two decades (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023), more so than in any other region, further underscores the relevance and urgency of this research.

As elites are a major source of affective polarisation (Banda & Cluverius, 2018; Westwood et al., 2018) Chapter 1 of this dissertation delves into the dynamics of elite affective polarisation (EAP) within the unique political landscape of Latin America, where leadership plays a central role (Dix, 1992). In this Chapter, Camilo Cristancho and I contribute to the existing literature by broadening the definition of EAP. We expand the traditional concept of EAP that understood it as the levels of hostility between politicians (Bäck et al., 2023; Enders, 2021; Røed et al., 2023) by recognizing a component of in-group favouritism.

Chapter 1 also fills a methodological gap as we measure the levels of EAP and find a significant variation across countries. Notably, our data indicates that countries governed by populist



presidents tend to show higher levels of EAP among elites. This suggests a significant link between the nature of political leadership and the degree of affective polarisation at the elite level, consistent with the theoretical proposal of McCoy et al. (2019)

Our initial expectations were that Latin American representatives acted more hostile toward other MPs as they have incentives for differentiating themselves from their peers within more volatile party system (Moraes & Béjar, 2023). However, contrary to our initial hypotheses, we discovered that electoral volatility exhibits a negative effect on EAP across all models. The same occurs with party systems with a high number of relevant parties and higher district magnitudes. This suggests that the size and proportionality of the party system may dilute affective polarisation among elites, challenging pre-existing theories (Lucas & Sheffer, 2023; Moraes & Béjar, 2023) on the impact of party dynamics and electoral system on elite affective behaviour.

Nevertheless, our research does confirm a positive relationship between high levels of elite ideological polarisation and EAP, reinforcing the significance of ideological divides in fostering emotional antagonism among political elites, as argued in previous research (Bäck et al., 2023; Comellas & Torcal, 2023). Additionally, our study explored the relationship between democratic quality and EAP. The findings consistently demonstrate that higher levels of democratic quality are associated with lower levels of affective polarisation, indicating that more democratic and liberal systems may cultivate a less affectively polarised elites (Graham & Svobik, 2020; Kingzette et al., 2021).

The implications of this chapter are substantial. The identified negative correlation between electoral volatility and EAP challenges existing assumptions in two crucial ways. Firstly, it contradicts the belief that the emergence of new parties and multiple candidates incites elites to adopt more hostile positions to differentiate themselves (Ballard et al., 2023; Moraes & Béjar, 2023). Secondly, it suggests that volatile and fluid party systems may hinder the development of affective loyalty bonds and stable party identities at the intra-group level. This volatility also impacts inter-party interactions, complicating the anticipation of opponents' policy positions and potentially shifting the focus of criticism away from newer parties to those more familiar to voters. This results are supported by the observed negative correlation between the proportionality and size of the party system with EAP supports the hypothesis that a smaller number of parties splitting the electoral 'cake' leads to clearer competition and facilitates partisan hostility (Gidron et al., 2020; Reiljan et al., 2023). In other words, an increased number

of relevant parties seems to dilute elite affective polarisation.

Furthermore, the observed positive correlation between ideological polarization and EAP underscores the significant impact of ideological divides on elite behaviour. This relationship is pivotal for elucidating the mechanisms underlying political antagonism among elites. It is often intuitively assumed that political elites engage in more ideologically driven reasoning compared to the general populace. Consequently, this suggests that ideological polarization is likely to find stronger resonance within the political elite than among the masses. Such an insight is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of elite polarisation and the factors that intensify these divisions. This observation resonates with the findings of Enders (2021) and Webster and Abramowitz (2017), who have documented similar patterns in political behaviour. Moreover, this relationship between ideological polarization and elite affective polarization mirrors the dynamics observed in mass affective polarization, as explored in the works of Mason (2018) and Comellas and Torcal (2023). These parallels between elite and mass polarization behaviours provide a more holistic view of the polarizing trends across different levels of the political spectrum.

Lastly, the chapter demonstrates the mitigating influence of democratic quality on EAP. This theoretical framework lays the groundwork for understanding the stabilizing role of democratic institutions and practices in moderating elite polarisation, suggesting that healthier democratic environments may foster less polarized elite interactions. If democracy thrives when opportunistic elites are constrained by an electorate with strong pro-democratic values (Almond & Verba, 1963; Przeworski, 2011), these same democratic institutions can mitigate elite hostility and moderate competitive tensions among political elites. Voters often face a dichotomy, having to choose between democratic principles and partisan interests (Svolik, 2020). These institutions serve as a critical check, not only on the potential authoritarian impulses of politicians but also on the escalation of partisan hostility, thereby safeguarding the democratic process and its underlying norms.

The chapter's novel methodological approach, employing advanced computational linguistics for measuring EAP, marks a significant advancement in the field. This approach, focusing on the behavioural aspects of polarisation rather than perception-based measures (such as feeling thermometers), provides a more nuanced understanding. Validated through elite surveys, human and synthetic (ChatGPT) supervision, this methodology addresses significant measurement challenges, bridging both empirical and methodological gaps in the literature.

Chapter 2 shifts the focus from elite affective polarisation to the determinants of mass affective polarisation, uncovering critical insights at both individual and institutional levels. My analysis revealed substantial heterogeneity across countries, highlighting the nuanced impact of political systems on affective polarisation. The results are consistent with previous research (Gidron et al., 2020; Reiljan et al., 2023). I found that parliamentary systems exhibit higher levels of party affective polarisation (PAP) compared to other political systems, while presidential regimes demonstrate higher levels of leader affective polarisation (LAP), suggesting a greater emphasis on political leaders over parties in these systems.

Party leaders have gained centrality in most parliamentary and multiparty systems and some of them have increasingly played a divisive role (Comellas Bonsfills, 2022). A key theoretical contribution of this chapter is the introduction of the concept of "leadership identification" as a crucial dimension in understanding contemporary political identities. This concept goes beyond the traditional evaluative/affective component of liking or disliking leaders, incorporating an intentional factor that influences individuals' political behaviours, such as voting. In my study, I found that leadership identification even surpasses the impact of partisan identification in shaping affective polarisation, indicating a trend towards the "personalization" of politics, even within parliamentary systems, as argued by Garzia (2011) and Garzia et al. (2022).

The implications of these findings are significant. While party identification and ideological polarisation remain significant predictors of affective polarisation, my study emphasizes the crucial roles of leadership identification, corruption perception, and the characteristics of political systems—particularly in presidential regimes. The heightened influence of leader identification in presidential systems, a common form of governance in Latin American countries, how political identities are increasingly being shaped by the personalization of politics, emphasizing a shift from party allegiance to leader-centric politics. These insights underscore the evolving nature of political affiliations and the distinct role leaders play in shaping the political landscape.

Additionally, my analysis revealed a positive correlation between affective polarisation and perceptions of corruption, underscoring that higher levels of perceived corruption are associated with increased affective polarisation. This finding supports the theoretic expectation that perceived corruption contributes significantly to feelings of injustice and unequal benefit distribution among the public, as discussed by De Vries and Solaz (2017) and Rothstein and

Uslaner (2005). Given that perceptions of corruption are known to significantly influence political trust (Della Porta, 2000), and considering the close correlation between trust and affective polarization (Torcal & Thomson, 2023), this correlation implies that in environments where political trust is diminished—potentially due to high perceptions of corruption— affective polarization is likely to intensify. This observation is particularly relevant in the context of Latin America, a region historically characterized by low levels of interpersonal trust, as noted by Carreras and Irepoğlu (2013).

The implications of this correlation are multifaceted. It underscores the possibility that affective polarisation in Latin American countries may be partly driven by widespread perceptions of corruption, which in turn erode trust in the political system. This erosion of trust can exacerbate political divisions, aligning individuals more staunchly with or against political figures and parties based on their perceptions of corruption.

However, it's important to recognize the role of affective polarisation in reinforcing partisan bias, a relationship that warrants careful consideration. Affective polarisation can strengthen partisan bias, leading individuals to view corruption through a partisan lens. This bias can lead to a tendency to overlook or downplay corrupt practices when they involve politicians from one's favoured party (Anduiza et al., 2013). This perceptual bias may limit the electoral consequences of corruption, as it can shield partisan-aligned politicians from accountability (Blais et al., 2017). Thus, in highly polarized environments, the intricate interplay among perceptions of corruption, the strengthening of partisan bias due to affective polarization, and affective polarization itself forms a complex cycle. This cycle can further erode trust in public institutions and the political process, perpetuating a challenging dynamic in the political landscape.

Finally, Chapter 3 deals with the effects of democratic backsliding on affective polarisation. Previous research by Kingzette et al. (2021), Orhan (2022) and Graham and Svobik (2020) already identified affective polarisation as an important predictor of democratic backsliding. In this Chapter, I reverse the causal mechanism and explore how anti-democratic policies employed by the incumbent to suppress the opposition, namely the suspension of the recall referendum in Venezuela, drives affective polarisation.

Descriptive analysis prior to the suspension of the recall referendum in Venezuela reveals a notable phenomenon. Despite the country's status as an electoral autocracy, individuals

identifying with the ruling party still perceived it as a democracy. This observation highlights how partisan bias may shape perceptions of democratic quality, corroborating existing research on assessment bias in highly affectively polarised environments (Iyengar et al., 2019). Intriguingly, the analysis of the natural experiment indicates that exposure to the partisan instrumentalization of an ostensibly impartial institution, like the electoral body, did not significantly heighten perceptions of societal polarisation among the public.

Regarding the impact of the recall referendum's suspension on affective polarisation, the data demonstrated heterogeneous effects. The suspension notably intensified out-group dislike among members of the opposition towards members of the ruling party. This suggests that experiences of perceived procedural unfairness can significantly amplify negative sentiments toward the ruling party among those aggrieved, while leaving the perceptions or evaluations of the hegemonic group relatively unaffected. This phenomenon aligns with Balinhas's (2023, p. 6) theory that polarisation is a conflict aimed at constructing and fixing a hegemonic version about a group's identity and how it should be treated.

The "winners and losers" theory (Lago & i Coma, 2017; Plescia, 2019; Przeworski, 2011) further illustrates these results. The "winners"—those aligned with the ruling party—did not exhibit a significant shift in their perceptions of the opposition or increased in-group favouritism, despite benefiting from democratic backsliding. In contrast, the "losers"—identified as opposition supporters—experienced a marked increase in animosity towards the ruling party, indicative of a heightened sense of injustice and increased polarisation. The suspension of the referendum led to a surge in negative sentiments among opposition identifiers, confirming the theory that the impact of democratic backsliding is asymmetric, exacerbating polarization especially among the disadvantaged "losers".

These findings imply that democratic backsliding affects society unevenly, with emotional consequences heavily influenced by partisan allegiance and perceived political agency impact. The study's use of unexpected events during the survey design method (Muñoz et al., 2020) precisely dissects these effects, showing that the suspension of the recall referendum as a form of democratic backsliding significantly heightened affective polarisation, but only among opposition supporters. However, the lack of a significant effect on the broader perception of societal polarisation suggests a more complex interpretation. It seems the broader political context did not view the suspension of the referendum as significantly contributing to overall societal polarisation, indicating a nuanced understanding of political polarisation.

Additionally, the opposition's mobilization and the public's varied perceptions of democracy demonstrate a complex landscape of affective polarisation, underscoring the role of citizens' beliefs in democratic processes. This study highlights that affective polarisation in Latin American politics is deeply intertwined with power dynamics and perceptions of democratic legitimacy. The Venezuelan case warns of how democratic backsliding can exacerbate societal divisions, stressing the need for fair and transparent political processes. Affective polarisation emerges as not just a matter of differing political views but also a reflection of the struggle for democratic integrity, with differentiated impacts on winners and losers emphasizing the importance of democratic resilience to prevent societal divides and erosion of political trust.

### **5.1 Limitations and future research.**

This dissertation acknowledges certain limitations and suggests avenues for future research. First, while the dissertation provides valuable insights into affective polarisation in Latin America, its generalizability may be limited by the specific contexts and countries studied. Future research should expand the scope to include a broader range of Latin American countries, particularly those with different political histories and institutional arrangements, to validate and extend these findings. Comparative research that includes other regions with different political systems could provide a more nuanced understanding of how various factors influence affective polarisation.

As we expand the sample of countries for future research, several factors identified as determinants in this study must be considered. Firstly, the type of political regime (parliamentary versus presidential) is crucial, as it can influence the predominant type of polarisation (PAP or LAP). Additionally, design aspects such as electoral systems, proportionality, the size of the party system, and dynamics like electoral volatility also warrant careful consideration. These factors are particularly significant as they shape and solidify party identity.

Secondly, the quality of democracy plays a significant role. Previous research has pointed that affective polarisation can lead to democratic backsliding (Graham & Svobik, 2020; Orhan, 2022; Svobik, 2020). A more in-depth analysis the adverse consequences of affective polarisation on social cohesion, political discourse, and governance is required, especially in developing democracies. This could involve examining the impact of AP on democratic institutions, public trust, and societal well-being. Correspondingly, this work has demonstrated

that anti-democratic actions by rulers can, in turn, escalate affective polarisation. This reciprocal influence highlights the necessity for more thorough research to disentangle the causal mechanisms driving this dual relationship.

This dissertation shows that democratic values act as a check on the hostile behaviour of political elites. Therefore, the intricate interplay between democratic norms and affective polarisation is deeply interwoven and merits further exploration. This calls for assessing and developing methods to mitigate or deter affective polarisation. For example, Wagner and Praprotnik (2023) suggest that cooperation between rivals has an important role in reducing affective polarization. Nonetheless, identifying the informal institutions that contribute to affective polarisation and understand how control processes are triggered within these structures is crucial.

The influence of populism is another critical area. This thesis, along with previous studies (Handlin, 2018; Hartevelde et al., 2021; McCoy & Somer, 2019), suggests a potential link between populism and affective polarisation. Populist leaders often emerge as polarising figures, making it essential to conduct an in-depth exploration to identify which aspects of populism, such as narrative strategies or institutional reforms, are most strongly correlated with emotional responses among individuals. Given the evolving role of social media and technology in politics, future research should explore how these platforms influence affective polarisation, particularly among younger voters and in the context of rapidly changing communication landscapes.

Lastly, contextual factors like corruption, closely linked to trust, have shown to be significant in explaining affective polarisation. The impact of corruption on perceptions of institutional performance merits further exploration, providing valuable insights into the intricate relationship between institutional integrity, trust, and affective polarisation. In terms of contextual factors, it is also important to expand the research agenda of how specific events act as catalysts for affective polarisation. In the line with Hobolt et al. (2020), this research should focus on understanding the conditions under which these events become polarising and their subsequent impact on society and politics.

While this dissertation expanded the current literature on elite affective polarisation, there is many things that we still do not know. First, while several authors have reported its importance (Bäck et al., 2023; Bullock, 2020; Røed et al., 2023), the impact of affective cues by the elites

are not explored in this work. In terms of elite-public dynamics, it is required to further explore the factors that drive public awareness and concern towards EAP. This research could explore the role of media coverage, societal values, or specific events that bring EAP to the forefront of public consciousness. Understanding what triggers public attention to EAP is crucial for comprehending its broader societal impact. As it also would be examining the circumstances under which affective polarisation becomes a prominent issue in public discourse. This could involve analysing political climates, significant events, or shifts in public opinion that make affective polarisation particularly relevant at certain times. Researching this aspect can shed light on the cyclical nature of affective polarisation's prominence in society.

Most of this work have focus on the determinants of EAP yet its consequences are a subject of equal importance. Study the outcomes of public responses to expressions of negative affect between elites. This research should consider both short-term and long-term consequences, such as policy changes, shifts in public trust, or alterations in the political landscape. Examining these consequences can reveal the broader impact of EAP on the political system and society.

My research fills a critical gap in the existing literature by examining the relationship between affective polarization and various institutional, contextual, and individual factors. It opens new avenues for future research to explore the impact of individual leaders' characteristics and behaviours in triggering affective polarization, particularly in parliamentary systems influenced by personalization trends. The concept of leadership identification warrants further exploration, particularly how it interacts with traditional forms of political allegiance and its impact on voter behavior, party dynamics, and electoral outcomes.

This dissertation has contended with the notion that affective polarisation can be uniformly applied across different contexts. The unique circumstances of Latin America—characterized by high volatility, institutional instability, corruption, populism, and trends of democratic backsliding—present a more intricate picture. Despite these challenges, the dissertation has provided compelling evidence that affective polarisation is a palpable and significant issue at both the individual and elite levels. Such findings lay the groundwork for developing more nuanced tools for measuring affective polarisation, which in turn, could better capture the complexity of the phenomenon in a Latin American context.

This research predominantly offers a cross-sectional view of affective polarisation. Longitudinal studies could provide a deeper understanding of how affective polarisation



evolves over time in response to political changes, economic shifts, and social movements<sup>16</sup>. This work itself makes a methodological contribution proposing a new method to capture elite polarisation, most of the comparative work keeps relying on feeling scales. Without the use of advanced measures like distance or behavioural metrics, which could have provided more depth in understanding how polarisation affects interpersonal and political relationships. Despite this, the study advances the measurement of affective polarisation beyond just party sentiments.

In terms of validation, the multi-faceted approach employed—encompassing convergent, human, and synthetic supervision—has added depth and credibility to our findings, ensuring that the nuances of political communication are comprehensively understood. The limitations acknowledged here open the door for future research to build upon this foundation, further validate the findings, and explore the historical, social, and political intricacies of Latin American countries.

This research represents only the first step in an ongoing effort to provide robust tools for measuring a multifaceted phenomenon like affective polarisation. The continuous line of research that stems from this work must involve generating more sophisticated measures of affective polarisation, ones capable of capturing the region's complexity and contributing to a broader and more accurate understanding.

This dissertation has staggered together theoretical innovation with empirical analysis to enhance our understanding of affective polarisation in Latin America. It stands as a testament to the region's complex political dynamics, offering a robust framework for academics and policymakers to navigate the intricacies of affective polarisation. As political landscapes evolve, the insights gleaned from this study will undoubtedly serve as beacons, guiding future inquiries and shaping strategies to address the nuanced challenges of political polarisation.

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<sup>16</sup> In this sense, it is important to recognize the valuable work being made by Torcal et al. (2020) with the TRI-POL project. Partial data and research outputs are available at:

<https://www.upf.edu/web/tri-pol>

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